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ABSTRACT

Assessing the current state of civic engagement in the United States, this document argues for increased participation from the citizenry, and discuses a number of programs supporting this effort. Although individuals remain actively involved in many civic activities through church, voluntary, and political associations, recent decades have witnessed a decline in involvement. This has been coupled with an erosion of trust in government and a disenchantment with even the very ideals of civic progress. This report from the National Commission on Civic Renewal argues for a collaborative effort at civic renewal. The steps that can be taken in the schools to help achieve civic renewal are dealt with on pages 14-16. Specifically, the goals of the Commission are to (1) assemble important scholarly and practical work already under way around the country on the revitalization of citizenship and civic life, and inspire new benchmark studies on the current condition of our citizenship and civic life; (2) spark discussion and deliberation across traditional barriers such as party affiliation, ideology, and race; (3) reach consensus on clear, practical and dramatic recommendations for enhancing the quality of citizenship and civic life; and (4) inspire the creation of new institutions and alliances that can carry these efforts forward after the Commission's work is done. The volume profiles 12 model programs contributing to these goals: Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Children's Aid Society; Hands On Atlanta; National Fatherhood Initiative; Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America; Public Achievement, St. Bernard's Grade School; Youth in Action, San Francisco Conservation Corps; Character Counts! Coalition; U.S. Youth Soccer; Charlotte Observer: "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods"; Close Up Foundation; and Project Vote Smart. (MJP)

A NATION OF SPECTATORS

How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CIVIC RENEWAL

ED 424 174

SO 029 360

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Senator Sam Nunn

Commissioners

Elaine L. Chao
John F. Cooke
Jean Bethke Elshtain
Henry J. Fernandez
Mary Ann Glendon
Peter C. Goldmark, Jr.
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Anna Faith Jones
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Funded through a generous grant from the Public Policy Program of the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Commission on Civic Renewal was established in 1996 to address widespread concerns about the condition of our country's civic life. Many kinds of political participation, at the local as well as national level, have declined over the past three decades. During that same period, the American people's confidence in the political system has fallen sharply, and we are less inclined to trust one another as fellow citizens than we were a generation ago. Many Americans believe that neighborhoods and community organizations are weaker than they once were and than they should be. And most Americans — some surveys indicate nearly 80 percent — believe we are in a period of pervasive moral decline, marked by weaker families, higher crime and social disorder, incivility, and powerful cultural forces, such as television, movies and popular music, that make it harder to raise our children and build a decent society.

The National Commission on Civic Renewal has sought to address these ills by gathering and assessing information and advice from a wide range of citizens; by studying and highlighting promising civic organizations and initiatives around the country; and by offering specific recommendations for improving our civic life. In addition to issuing this final report, the Commission has sponsored a series of scholarly working papers and has created a new Index of National Civic Health.

The Commission's ongoing activities are housed at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, a research center of the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland. To learn more about the Commission or its specific publications and projects, please contact us at the address below or consult our Web site:

The National Commission on Civic Renewal
3111 Van Munching Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742

Tel: (301) 405-2790
FAX: (301) 314-9346
http://www.puaf.umd.edu/civicrenewal

A NATION OF SPECTATORS

How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It

FINAL REPORT OF

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CIVIC RENEWAL

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CO-CHAIRS' PREFACE

This is a report about all of us in our capacity as citizens. On behalf of the members of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, we are pleased to submit it for the consideration of our fellow Americans.

Our first task, in the pages that follow, is to present an accurate and balanced portrait of our civic condition. As the report makes clear, we are deeply concerned about citizens' disengagement from the civic realm, and from its moral underpinnings. And yet, in the activities of individuals and groups across the country, we recognize signs of a nascent movement for civic renewal. To help strengthen these efforts, we suggest some practical steps that citizens can take—as individuals, parents, neighbors, members of faith communities, partners in local self-government, and participants in national movements—to improve our civic life.

The National Commission on Civic Renewal was created and sustained through a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, a public-spirited foundation in the finest tradition of the American voluntary sector. The Commission has received no public money and possesses no official standing. Its members are private citizens adding their voices to the dialogue of democracy.

We bring diverse backgrounds and experiences to this endeavor. We come from different ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Some of us have spent the bulk of our lives in the public sector, others in the private sector, still others in foundations and voluntary associations. Some of us have worked in official Washington, some in the states, some in the neighborhoods and streets of our cities.

Unlike many commissions, we are politically diverse as well. We were certainly not selected to reach predetermined conclusions. Some of us have worked for conservative administrations and causes, others for liberal ones. We have found ourselves on opposing sides in some of the great controversies of our times. But we were brought together on this Commission, and held together, by a common concern for the civic condition of our country and by the shared determination to improve it.

During the past eighteen months of hearings and deliberations, our debates have been vigorous, occasionally heated, but always civil. Civility does not mean eliminating passion and conflict from public discourse. Nor does it mean agreement for agreement's sake. Civility means disagreeing with others without demonizing them. It means respecting them as sincere patriots and as partners in a shared quest for civic answers that are both practically effective and morally compelling.

Speaking only in our individual voices, no one of us would have written this report in exactly this way. We have worked hard to find — and build upon — common ground. We steered away from those areas in which it became clear we lacked special competence or minimum consensus. This report summarizes those areas where our efforts achieved some success. In the case of one important issue where we could not reach consensus — the appropriate extent of publicly-supported school choice — we report the grounds of our disagreement and the civic issues it raises.

The release of this report is but one step on a long road. We will continue to do what we can. But the fate of today's movement for civic renewal will ultimately be determined by the citizens of this nation — all of us.

While the outcome is in doubt, our democratic experiment itself gives us grounds for hope. As James Madison rightly suggested more than two hundred years ago, republican government presupposes more trustworthy human qualities — more virtues — than does any other form of government. Our nation could not have survived and prospered if this confidence in the capacity for virtue of democratic citizens had been misplaced.

We believe that the American people can once again rise to the challenge of self-government. It is in that spirit that we offer this report to our fellow citizens.

William J. Bennett

Sam Nunn

FINAL REPORT

FINAL REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CIVIC RENEWAL

Defining the Challenge of Civic Renewal

On the eve of the twenty-first century, America is prosperous, secure, and free. With lower levels of unemployment, opportunity is expanding. In recent decades, important social movements have helped protect individual rights and have brought long-suppressed voices into our public dialogue. While racial, ethnic, and class divisions persist, we are a more inclusive and tolerant nation than we were a generation ago.[1]

This should be a time of hope for Americans. And when we consider our economic circumstances, it is. But when we assess our country's civic and moral condition, we are deeply troubled.

And with good reason:

During the past generation, our families have come under intense pressure, and many have crumbled. Neighborhood and community ties have frayed. Many of our streets and public spaces have become unsafe. Our public schools are mediocre for most students, and catastrophic failures for many. Our character-forming institutions are enfeebled. Much of our popular culture is vulgar, violent, and mindless. Much of our public square is coarse and uncivil. Political participation is at depressed levels last seen in the 1920s. Public trust in our leaders and institutions has plunged.

Summarizing a comprehensive new study, a leading investigator of public attitudes toward government and society concludes that

> Worry about the moral health of American society is suppressing satisfaction with the state of the nation, just as discontent with the honesty of elected officials is a leading cause of distrust in government. In the broadest sense, these ethical concerns are now weighing down American attitudes as Vietnam, Watergate, double-digit inflation and unemployment once did.[2]

Our moral and civic ills are most often discussed in the context of our troubled urban areas. There is no doubt that the civic condition of communities is affected by their economic condition. The breakdown of families, public safety, and neighborhoods is compounded by economic misery and diminished opportunities. The decline in civic and political engagement is especially pronounced among individuals who are sliding down the economic ladder, or who have never taken the first step up that ladder.

But there is trouble in Plano, Texas, and in the Hamptons, too. A free society depends on the standards and behavior of average citizens, and of the most fortunate as well. It is an evasion of responsibility to focus only on the inner city, or to place all the blame on "liberal elites" or "right-wing extremists." Much of what has gone wrong in America we have done — and are still doing — to ourselves.

Too many of us have become passive and disengaged. Too many of us lack confidence in our capacity to make basic moral and civic judgments, to join with our neighbors to do the work of community, to make a difference. Never have we had so many opportunities for participation, yet rarely have we felt so powerless. Indeed, according to sociologist Alan Wolfe, an unpleasant feature of contemporary middle-class morality is a "perverse pleasure in powerlessness."[1] In a time that cries out for civic action, we are in danger of becoming a nation of spectators.

To be sure, there are many obstacles to effective involvement. But too many of us blame others for civic ills that we have helped cause, and that only we can cure. We fret about the weakness of our families but will not make the personal commitments needed to preserve them. We worry about the consequences of out-of-wedlock births but refuse to condemn them. We deplore the performance of our public schools, but somehow we can't find the time to join parents' associations, attend school board meetings, or even help our children with their homework. We complain about the influence of popular culture on our young people, but as parents we do not try very hard to monitor the programs our children watch and the music they hear. We desert neighborhood associations and then lament the fraying of community. We elect, and then reelect, leaders for whom we profess mistrust. We say we do not have the time for civic life. But in fact we enjoy more leisure than ever before. And too many of us spend too much of it watching television.

Yes, leadership matters. But the core issue isn't leadership; it's citizenship.

Yes, leadership matters. It matters a great deal. But today in our democracy the core issue is not leadership; it is citizenship.

A generation ago we realized that the degradation of our physical environment was the result of countless millions of decisions, by individual citizens as well as large corporations, and that if we really wanted to clean it up we would have to change our habits as well as our laws. The degradation of our civic environment stems from similar causes and requires similar remedies. It is legitimate and honorable for a free people to work as hard to protect its moral ecology as its natural environment. As citizens, we must ask more of ourselves.

We claim no originality for this conclusion. It is an idea as old as America. Citizenship is the basis of self-government, and lasting self-government is a monumental political achievement. In America we do not depend on kings, clerics, or aristocrats, or (for that matter) on technocratic elites or self-appointed leaders to serve as the "vanguard" for the rest of us. We rely on the will of the people — that is, on ourselves.

Our rare good fortune is an opportunity to reach for civic excellence.

Active citizenship is an old idea, but today it must contend with new challenges. Compared with previous generations, Americans today place less value on what we owe others as a matter of moral obligation and common citizenship; less value on personal sacrifice as a moral good; less value on the social importance of respectability and observing the rules; less value on restraint in matters of pleasure and sexuality; and correspondingly greater value on self-expression, self-realization, and personal choice.[4]

We must ask ourselves some hard questions about this new understanding of individual liberty. Dare we continue to place adult self-gratification above the well-being of our children? Can we relentlessly pursue individual choice at the expense of mutual obligation without corroding vital social bonds? Will we remain secure in the enjoyment of our individual rights if we fail to accept and discharge our responsibilities? Is there a civic invisible hand that will preserve our democratic institutions in the absence of informed and engaged citizens?

Here is our answer:

We believe that economic productivity is important but must not be confused with civic health. Our country's wealth is unprecedented. But great nations do not live by bread alone, and great civilizations are not judged by wealth alone. Our rare good fortune is an opportunity to reach for civic excellence. History will judge us harshly if we squander it.

We believe in life, liberty, equality, and the uncoerced consent of the governed.

We believe that all men and women are entitled to political equality without discrimination based on race, sex, or creed.

We believe that all human beings possess fundamental rights such as freedom of religion, of speech, of the press, and of assembly, and that government's essential purpose is to protect these rights.

We believe that these rights are most effectively protected in a system of ordered liberty that includes representative government based on free

competitive elections, an independent judiciary upholding the rule of law, and an executive forceful enough to provide energy without being so powerful as to threaten liberty.

But institutional arrangements are not the whole of the democratic way of life, which rests as well on belief in the power of reason; in free inquiry and learning; in the spiritual capacity of human beings; and in the proposition — both empirical and moral — that the human condition can be bettered.

We believe that the essence of democracy is self-government, that self-government begins with the government *of* the self and moves to the public efforts of citizens whose need for the restraint of law is mitigated by their capacity to restrain themselves.

We believe that democratic citizenship must be grounded in shared civic principles, and that citizens should use them to judge and, when necessary, challenge and change practices inconsistent with these principles.

We believe that the capacity for democratic citizenship must be nurtured in institutions such as families, neighborhoods, schools, faith communities, local governments, and political movements — and therefore, that our democracy must attend carefully to the health of these institutions.

We believe that democracy requires both individual responsibility and a felt sense of obligation to the common good, that both have weakened dangerously in recent decades and must now be renewed.

Democracy is neither a consumer good nor a spectator sport, but rather the work of free citizens, engaged in shared civic enterprises.

We believe that democracy is neither a consumer good nor a spectator sport, but rather the work of free citizens, engaged in shared civic enterprises.

We believe that building democracy means individuals, voluntary associations, private markets, and the public sector working together — not locked in battle.

We believe that democracy means not only discussing our differences, but also undertaking concrete projects with our fellow citizens to achieve common goals. The goals can be as focused as cleaning up a neighborhood park, or as broad as defending our country. Whatever their scope, such endeavors offer the best hope for bringing Americans together across lines of race, class, and religion. It is precisely because our armed services have a clear and important mission — real work to do — that they have gone farther than most other institutions toward uniting diverse individuals into teams shaped by high standards and shared purposes.

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This idea — citizens freely working together — is at the heart of the American conception of civic liberty, through which citizens take responsibility for improving the conditions of their lives. Civic liberty offers citizens the power to act, and it strengthens their conviction that they can make a difference.

This, too, is an old idea. From the beginning, Americans have prided themselves on their ability to join together with their fellow citizens to get things done. They didn't realize how rare a thing it was in the world at large to work together as they did. But visitors from Europe noticed. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that at the time of the French Revolution "there were not ten men in all of France" capable of forming associations as the Americans were wont to do every day, and he noted how these associations served, often inadvertently, as schools for citizenship.

Times have changed since Tocqueville's voyage to our shores, but the essential point remains valid today: Citizenship begins with commitment rather than expertise. Citizens do not need special preparation, advanced education, or bureaucratic permits to get involved. And once we do, empowerment, optimism, and trust are enhanced, the capacity to understand our fellow citizens increases, and the public's work gets done in new and unexpected ways.

A New Movement

Millions of our fellow citizens agree. Within the neighborhoods, the towns, the local communities of America are the stirrings of a new movement of citizens acting together to solve community problems. It is a nonpartisan movement that crosses traditional jurisdictions and operates on a shoestring. It is a movement that begins with civic dialogue and leads to public action. It has gone largely unnoticed, unappreciated, and unsupported.

Within the neighborhoods, the towns, the local communities of America are the stirrings of a new movement of citizens acting together to solve community problems.

To mention but a few examples:

- Neighborhoods are organizing to bring back businesses and jobs, to offer constructive activities for young people, and to reclaim their streets and public spaces.
- Foundations and other charitable organizations are working more directly to solve local problems.
- Young people are volunteering to help others in increased numbers.
- Faith-based institutions are tackling the toughest problems, from family disintegration to homelessness to drug abuse.

- Local newspapers and television stations are pioneering new forms of civic journalism.
- Civic entrepreneurs are making creative use of modern information technologies.
- Scholars and activists are working to increase the level of deliberation and civility in our public discourse.
- New organizations are refocusing the attention of families, schools, and communities on the formation of civic character.
- Local governments are fostering innovation and encouraging new networks of community institutions.

There are also indications that some of the most worrisome trends of recent decades are turning around. Divorce has declined from its peaks of the early 1980s. The percentage of unmarried teens who are abstaining from sexual intercourse has risen from the lows of the early 1990s. Crime rates, while far higher than a generation ago, have fallen sharply in this decade. School performance, while still inadequate, has risen from the depths recorded in the early 1980s. Trust in government, in institutions, and in our fellow citizens is modestly higher than it was a few years ago.

In sum, we see troubling evidence of civic decline, but also encouraging signs of a nascent movement for civic renewal across our land. Our challenge is not to invent civic renewal from scratch, but rather to find ways in which individuals and institutions can build on the foundation laid down by thousands of organizations and millions of Americans.

The forces of civic renewal must be further strengthened if they are to prove adequate to confront our civic ills.

The key issue is not whether our civic condition is weaker than in the past, but whether it is strong enough to meet the challenges of the present. While citizens have begun to arrest, and in some cases reverse, many negative developments of recent decades, we believe that the forces of civic renewal must be further strengthened if they are to prove adequate to confront our civic ills. Individuals, families, neighborhood and community groups, voluntary associations, faith-based institutions, foundations, corporations, public institutions — all have an important role to play.

Civic renewal often becomes embroiled in a debate between the proponents of activist government and the partisans of civil society. This debate is unproductive. There is no simple or direct relationship between the reach of government and the vitality of civil society. There is no reason to believe that reducing the size of government would automatically increase the scope of voluntary activities. To cite but one example: it is

the first duty of government to keep order and provide security. Civil society cannot flourish if citizens are worried about the safety of their streets, parks, and schools. Nor, conversely, is there any reason to believe that government, however competent, can replace the distinctive functions of voluntary associations.

Restoring trust in our national public institutions is an essential component of civic renewal.

The role of local institutions is crucial, because civic renewal begins at home. When citizens are asked what they mean by "community," most invoke neighborhoods and towns. Even in the Information Age, place still matters. Even in the era of multinational institutions and global corporations, scale still matters. Large organizations of every kind — public, private, and voluntary — must therefore develop new ways of nurturing and strengthening local institutions consistent with their own community-based missions.

But reinvigorated localities cannot substitute for effective national institutions. America's tradition of limited government implies — and requires — healthy skepticism toward our national government. Vigorous criticism of leaders and institutions is the lifeblood of any democracy, and the hallmark of our democracy throughout its history. But we believe that the current level of mistrust is inconsistent with civic health. Americans cannot love their country if they have contempt for its government.

Restoring trust in our national public institutions is an essential component of civic renewal. We must limit the national government to the tasks that it does best. But we must also set aside the false and cynical proposition that the national government ruins everything it touches. Civic renewal means working to improve our government, not abandoning or trashing it.

We call upon our nation's public officials to place the restoration of public trust at the forefront of their concerns. This means doing the public's business efficiently and effectively; it means speaking honestly to the people, not diminishing confidence by making promises that cannot be kept; it means keeping our democracy open and responsive to the voices of all the people, not just those with money and connections; and it means respecting and nurturing the democratic capacities of citizens and communities to choose and act for themselves.

Civic renewal does not require moral perfection, either of average citizens or of our leaders. It does require that we all take seriously our basic commitments as parents, spouses, citizens, and people of faith. Public officials must hold themselves to the standards of conduct and character we try to teach our children — because the restoration of public trust requires it.

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From the origin of our republic, we have been a strongly religious nation, and the Founders were near-unanimous in viewing religion as an aid and friend to the constitutional order. As George Washington reminded a young nation in his Farewell Address, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are essential supports. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion." Today, because we remain a strongly religious nation, faithful citizens and faith-based institutions are pivotal to any American movement for civic renewal.

But while civic renewal unquestionably rests on a moral foundation, it does not require any particular denominational creed. The foundation we need is rather the constitutional faith we share — in the moral principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence, and the public purposes set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution.

The defense of liberty requires more than the pursuit of happiness.

The rebellious signers of the Declaration of Independence risked everything, pledging to one another "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." Not every age requires such heroism. But for us as for those who have gone before, the defense of liberty requires more than the pursuit of happiness; it requires the modest but vital virtues of loving parents, faithful spouses, good neighbors, law-abiding citizens, and sober patriots. We need tolerance and commitment; and especially in moments of challenge, we need the capacity for sacrifice.

These are the moral imperatives of democracy — in the words of James Madison, the virtue needed for self-government. Only this shared civic morality can bring us together across our differences to secure the greatest of our public purposes — the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

Meeting the Challenge of Civic Renewal

The goals of civic renewal are straightforward: to strengthen the institutions that help form the knowledge, skills, and virtues citizens need for active engagement in civic life; to remove the impediments to civic engagement wherever they exist; and to multiply the arenas for meaningful and effective civic action.

In the pursuit of these goals, we must be both modest and tenacious. Modest because public policy has at best limited capacities to address problems that are moral, cultural, or spiritual. Modest because the institutions of civil society are organic, not mechanical, and can at best be nurtured, not engineered. But tenacious because our civic ills are

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formidable, and because we cannot meet large challenges with small commitments. And tenacious because we know that it can be done: that in cities across our country, local citizens and policies have already begun to combat civic decline — reducing crime, violence, and indecency, improving the quality of schools and public spaces.

Here are some steps we can take.

Individuals. We may work in professions, but we live in places. National professional organizations are important, and they should reflect on ways in which they can more fully promote the public interest, not just professional self-interest. But professional organizations are not a civic substitute for locally oriented institutions. Nor can these local institutions thrive without the active participation of all kinds of Americans — including those with high levels of education, income, and civic skills. We therefore challenge every citizen to become an active member of at least one association dealing with matters of local neighborhood, church, school, or community concern.

Families. Families are crucial sites for shaping character and virtue, they provide vivid models of how to behave in the world, and they help connect both children and adults to their neighborhoods and communities. Our civic condition cannot be strong if our families remain weak.

Our civic condition cannot be strong if our families remain weak.

As a nation, we must commit ourselves to the proposition that every child should be raised in an intact two-parent family whenever possible, and by one caring and competent adult at the very least. This means support at every level of government, and by foundations, for organizations that are working effectively to reduce teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births and to reconnect absent fathers with their families. It means sweeping away impediments to adoption. It means dramatically reforming foster care and establishing a national norm that no child should spend more than one birthday without a permanent home in a stable, loving family. It means a massive new partnership among the public, private, and voluntary sectors to provide adult mentors for one million young people now languishing on waiting lists across our land.

Neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are places where citizens learn the importance of what they have in common and of what they can accomplish when they act in concert. Every neighborhood should assume responsibility for matters of significant local concern, emphasizing areas where neighbors can do meaningful civic work together. For example: neighborhood crime watches; cleaning, repairing, and patrolling public parks; escort services for students walking from home to school in the morning and back in the afternoon.

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Economic revitalization is a key to local civic renewal. The National Commission is especially impressed by the accomplishments of local Community Development Corporations in both rebuilding neighborhoods and mobilizing neighborhood participation. We call on all sectors of society to increase significantly their support for CDCs, both directly and through proven intermediaries such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

City governments can make important contributions to civic renewal through systematic efforts to empower their citizens. For example:

- Seattle established a Neighborhood Matching Fund through which public funds are set aside for projects — but only if neighborhoods match these resources with donated time, work, materials, or money.
- Indianapolis created the Front Porch Alliance, through which the city spotlights and supports the community renewal efforts of neighborhood associations and faith-based organizations.
- Burnsville, Minn., convened 700 citizens in deliberations to help set priorities for the city, hold public officials accountable, and mobilize the entire community to meet key goals.

The National Commission on Civic Renewal believes that every community should take comparable steps, consistent with local circumstances, to empower its citizens. We applaud the efforts of organizations such as the National Civic League, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, the Civic Practices Network, the Center for Living Democracy, the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, and *Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship* to identify promising community-based empowerment efforts, to make this information available to communities searching for usable models, and to weave together local activities into a wider community-based movement for civic renewal.

Our schools should foster the knowledge, skills, and virtues our young people need to become good democratic citizens.

Schools. We offer two sets of proposals.

First, we add our voices to others — such as the Communitarian Network, the Character Counts! Coalition, the Character Education Partnership, and the Center for Civic Education — in support of a far greater emphasis on civic and character education. We believe that our schools should foster the knowledge, skills, and virtues our young people need to become good democratic citizens. Specifically:

- Schools should reorganize their internal life to reinforce basic civic virtues such as personal and social responsibility, by giving students far more responsibility for maintaining cleanliness and discipline in classrooms and on school grounds.

- Every school should offer serious, age-appropriate instruction in civic knowledge and skills, focused on founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the Constitution, and other significant writings from the rich quarry of our political and social history.[8]
- Whenever possible, civic education should include the regular reading and discussion of newspapers, because the habit of newspaper reading has been shown to enhance civic information and participation throughout adult life.
- While the National Commission has not reached agreement on mandatory community service for high school students, we are impressed with the ways in which well-designed community work carefully linked to classroom reflection can enhance the civic education of students. We are also impressed with the positive civic consequences of programs that bring students into direct contact with government at every level, and we urge more schools to forge ties with them.
- Every state should require all students to demonstrate mastery of basic civic information and concepts as a condition of high school graduation.

In addition to their role in forming civic competence and character, we believe that the overall performance of our schools has important effects on our civic condition. To cite but one example: students consigned to failing schools are far less likely to achieve full participation in civic life. Free citizens must be educated. For this reason, we offer some proposals to improve teaching and learning.

The overall performance of our schools has important effects on our civic condition.

- Fifteen years after the publication of "A Nation at Risk," fewer than half of our high school students are completing what that report identified as a basic academic curriculum. Every state should close this academic curriculum gap.
- Just as students cannot learn what they are not taught, so teachers cannot teach what they have not learned. Shockingly high percentages of teachers have neither majors nor minors in the subjects they teach. We call upon every state to close this teacher preparation gap and ensure that teachers can at least pass the subject-matter tests required of their students.
- Despite the political and substantive difficulties, the federal government should spur the development of a voluntary national testing system with high standards and make it available for adoption (or adaptation) by states and localities. Every state should make reliable information on the performance of its teachers and students available to parents and the public.

■ The federal government, states, and localities should cooperate to increase parental choice through such measures as open enrollment and public school choice within districts (and even beyond). Within five years, every state should enact meaningful charter school legislation, and the federal government should dramatically increase its support for charter schools.

While the National Commission has focused its report and recommendations on areas of substantial agreement, we note an important area of ongoing disagreement among us.

Some members of the National Commission advocate public support for parental choice broadened to include private and religious schools, especially for low-income students now trapped in failing systems. These members believe that wider choice will enhance educational opportunity and accountability, improve quality, help get parents more involved in their children's schooling, and catalyze civic engagement. They consider school choice to be a crucial and necessary step toward civic renewal and self-government.

Other Commission members believe that public schools have been, and continue to be, vital meeting grounds in which future citizens learn to respect and work with one another across their differences. These members fear that choice widened beyond the bounds of public schools could diminish support for public education, further fragment our society, and weaken our democracy.

We were not able to resolve these differences. (Not surprisingly, our nation's representatives have not yet reached common ground, either.) But we do agree on the civic standards and principles that should be employed in public deliberation on school choice, and we call for continued civil dialogue on this question.

We must do what we can to strengthen the capacity of faith-based institutions to nurture civic renewal.

Faith-based institutions. A growing body of evidence suggests that faith-based institutions can be especially effective in dealing with problems such as family break-up, fatherlessness, drug use, and long-term welfare dependency.[9] In many communities where material resources are scarce and other civil institutions have withered, these institutions may be among the few functioning organizations that remain. Within constitutional bounds, we must do what we can to strengthen their capacity to nurture civic renewal. We recommend the following steps:

- Faith-based institutions should take full advantage of new opportunities under federal law to receive public support for activities such as job search programs, "second chance" homes for unmarried teen parents, child care, and drug treatment, while maintaining their religious character. The federal government should broaden this new partnership with faith-based institutions to cover the maximum feasible range of social services.
- The federal government should revise the tax code to increase incentives for charitable contributions and to recognize the charitable efforts of all Americans, including poor and low-income families.
- Individual faith-based institutions should band together into community-wide coalitions to achieve important civic objectives. One example of this is New Haven, Connecticut's Elm City Congregations Organized, which picketed liquor stores within 500 feet of schools and then pushed successfully for legislation banning such stores.

Television has become an increasingly dominant and destructive force in our society.

Indeed, faith-based coalitions should spearhead a national movement to improve security and build community by reducing the concentration of places that sell alcohol. Especially in poor communities, these outlets are often hornet's nests of alcohol-related social problems such as public indecency, crime, broken windows, and homelessness. Imposing stricter zoning on liquor stores would be a good start, and city officials should take the lead in enforcing bans on liquor ads from the horizons of schools, religious institutions, and public housing. Zoning laws should also be used effectively to limit the destructive impact of pornography shops on families and neighborhoods.

- Leading scholars have called for the development of new local and regional nonprofit grant-making entities that would assist corporations, foundations, and individuals in identifying and supporting worthy faith-based youth and community-building efforts. We agree completely. We call for a mobilization of public, foundation, and corporate support for new ventures such as John DiIulio's Jeremiah Project, which will help gather credible data about the effectiveness of faith-based activities, mobilize resources, and direct them to promising faith-based programs.

The media. Television has become an increasingly dominant and destructive force in our society, and most Americans — especially parents — are troubled by it. This is not to say that television has done no good, or that there are no quality shows on the air, or that television is solely responsible for our moral, social, and civic ills. But taken in its

totality, television is doing a lot of damage: because it privatizes us, drawing us away from social relations and civic engagement; and because it helps liberate powerful instincts — toward violence, sexual license, and the pursuit of immediate intense sensation — that a decent civic life seeks to moderate.

The problem is not restricted to entertainment programming but now extends to local news, which increasingly emphasizes violence, outrageous conduct, and the negative aspects of our society at the expense of civic efforts to improve communities. Nor, regrettably, is the problem restricted to television, but includes movies and popular music as well.

While many of us applaud modest public steps such as the Children's Television Act, the V-chip, and voluntary ratings systems, we believe that the problems of the contemporary mass media are best addressed through high-profile moral suasion. We must hold the entertainment industry as accountable for civic harm as we do the tobacco industry for physical harm. This is not a breach of the First Amendment, and it is not censorship. We recognize that our society has changed and that it would be unrealistic to expect television broadcasters and producers to return to their longstanding but now-abandoned self-imposed code of conduct. But we are confident that it is possible, in a manner fully consistent with our constitutional traditions and respect for freedom of expression, to create an updated set of common voluntary standards that would reassure the American public that there are some lines that television will not cross in its quest for profits. We call for an intensive public (not governmental) dialogue directed toward this end.

We believe that a sense of shame still exists at the highest reaches of corporate America and in the entertainment industry.

But citizens need not wait for these efforts to bear fruit. Accountability can and should begin right now, with public applause for corporations that advertise in and support worthy programs and public rebukes for those who do the opposite. We believe that a sense of shame still exists at the highest reaches of corporate America and in the entertainment industry. We intend to appeal to it, and we urge other Americans to do the same.

For example, we believe that once mobilized for this cause, parents' groups can achieve the capacity for effective moral suasion. As organized citizens, they can acquire not just economic clout, which affects what the media offer the public; they can acquire a public voice as well. When media organizations are forced publicly to justify their choices in moral (not simply financial) terms, they may alter their conduct. And the moral debate can help citizens discover how to use our cultural freedom in civically productive ways.

Free markets are vital to free societies. But not every consequence of market-based decisions in every sector is equally compatible with the health of our democracy. Recent evidence suggests that far more Americans regularly get their information from local television news than from any other source.[10] The evidence also suggests that economic competition is driving local news in the direction of sensationalized coverage, especially of crime.[11] This trend has significant and (we believe) negative civic consequences. Viewers are numbed into the belief that our society is falling apart and that nothing can be done to improve it. Civic activists find it hard to expand the scope of their efforts, and may even become discouraged, when local television fails to cover their important public work.

News is a public good, not just a commodity.

We believe that local television stations (and locally based newspapers and radio as well) can and should give far more attention to civic groups that are contributing to community problem-solving. In addition, they should sharply increase their investment in the kind of journalism that promotes public awareness of key civic issues and enhances deliberation about solutions.

Such efforts can yield large civic dividends. In Springfield, Mo., for example, a fourteen-part series in the local newspaper culminated in a "Good Community Fair" at which 7,000 citizens turned out to join community problem-solving organizations and create new ones.

We are well aware of the competitive pressures that lead news directors and station managers in the direction of "If it bleeds, it leads." But we would remind them that news is a public good, not just a commodity. We call on them to recall and renew their sense of civic responsibility.

It may well be that the tension between economic competition and civic responsibility cannot be adequately addressed one station at a time, because each may fear that others will take advantage of its restraint. We therefore call on television stations to enter into community compacts with one another—agreements in which each station pledges to increase and upgrade its civic coverage so that none bears a disproportionate cost for the practice of civic virtue.

Conclusion: What the Commission Can Contribute

The members of the National Commission are working individually as well as collectively to advance the cause of civic renewal. But our personal obligation does not end with the publication of this report. We cannot rightly call upon all Americans to do more if we are not willing

to do so ourselves. We therefore pledge to form, join, and support four ongoing task forces, each with an important civic mission.

The Civic Monitoring Project will regularly update the Index of National Civic Health and will report the results to the nation each year.

The Civic Education Project will seek to advance the cause of school-based civic education, in accordance with the recommendations of this report. The Project will, for example, work with existing civic education groups to help assess the status of civic education in each state and press every state for rigorous civic curricula and graduation requirements. It will also work with national and regional newspaper publishers to ensure that quality newspapers are regularly made available to every middle and high school student to serve as building blocks of civic education.

The Entertainment Media Project will provide a focal point for an ongoing civic dialogue with key television, movie, and music decision-makers as well as with their advertisers. In addition, the Project will offer regular public awards for exemplary entertainment decisions and will publish an annual "Ten Worst" list.

The Community News Compact Project will seek to catalyze the formation of voluntary agreements—Community News Compacts—among local stations to increase the scope and quality of their civic coverage.

We close with a call to citizenship — the acts and traits of character that create the possibility of self government.

While we the members of the National Commission will do what we can to contribute to the civic renewal of our country, our efforts can provide only a tiny fraction of what America needs. Civic renewal means all citizens doing their share, in free association with one another. And it means leaders in every sector doing what they can to empower citizens.

There is no blueprint for civic success, but there is a sure-fire recipe for civic failure — disengagement from the enterprises that help define the common good. We therefore close where we began, with a call to citizenship — acts and traits of character that create the possibility of self-government but that no government can enforce:

Get involved. Join with others who care. Hold your fellow citizens and your leaders accountable. See yourselves as active agents, not passive victims. Above all, take responsibility. After all, it is your democracy — not a consumer good, not a spectator sport, but rather the work of many hands — starting with your own.

NOTES

1 See especially Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All* (New York: Viking, 1998).

2 Andrew Kohut, "Deconstructing Distrust: How Americans View Government," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1998.

3 Wolfe, *One Nation, After All*, p. 313.

4 Daniel Yankelovich, "How Changes in the Economy Are Reshaping American Values," in Henry J. Aaron, Thomas E. Mann, and Timothy Taylor, eds., *Values and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994).

5 For a discussion, see Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

6 Some key recent contributions to this discussion include Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition edited by Michael Novak (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1996); Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Lanham, Md.: Regnery Gateway, 1992); and E. J. Dionne, ed., *Civil Society: What is it? Why is everybody talking about it?, Brookings Review* 15:4 (Fall 1997).

7 Thomas M. Guterbock and John C. Fries, "Maintaining America's Social Fabric: The AARP Survey of Civic Involvement" (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons, 1997), chapter III.

8 An outstanding example of successful civic education is "We the People . . . The Citizen and the Constitution," a nationwide program for students created and run by the Center for Civic Education. Independent studies conducted by the Educational Testing Service, the Council for Basic Education, and Professor Richard Brody of Stanford University (among others) have found that the program effectively promotes both civic knowledge and commitment to democratic principles and values.

9 See John J. DiIulio, "The Lord's Work: The Church and the 'Civil Society Sector'," *Brookings Review* 15:4 (Fall 1997).

10 "In Retrospect: Public Opinions 1997," The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, p. 18.

11 Michael Winerip, "Looking for an 11 O'Clock Fix," *New York Times Magazine*, January 11, 1998.

AMERICA'S CIVIC CONDITION

A SUMMARY VIEW

Civic health may be measured along several dimensions — participation in electoral politics, political and social trust, voluntary sector activity, and attitudes and conduct bearing on the moral condition of society, to name but a few.

In an effort to provide a clear and simple summary of our civic condition, the Commission has created an Index of National Civic Health, which measures and combines trends over the past quarter century in political participation, political and social trust, associational membership, family integrity and stability, and crime.

Not all of these trends move in the same direction. Political participation and all forms of trust have declined significantly in the past generation, although there is some evidence of stabilization and perhaps even modest improvement during the past few years. Crime statistics have improved, especially in the early 1980s and again in the past five years. The soaring rate of divorce stabilized in the early 1980s and has trended slowly downward ever since. Non-marital births rose sharply for three decades before peaking in 1991 and then declining modestly. (The number of women having abortions also declined — by 15 percent — between 1990 and 1995.) And statistics on associational memberships of various kinds present a mixed picture, with declines in many traditional organizations (such as gender-specific social clubs and unions) offset by gains in professional societies and faith-related small groups.

In short, there have been a number of promising developments over the past decade. But when most Americans evaluate our civic condition, their point of comparison is not the late 1980s or early 1990s, but rather their sense of how things were a generation ago. In this key respect, the Index of National Civic Health is consistent with the beliefs of most Americans: our overall civic condition is weaker than it was — and in need of significant improvement.

Method of Aggregation

INCH is an average of 22 trend-lines, which are weighted differently as described below. These variables use a wide variety of scales and units. To make them comparable, we set them all at 100 in the year 1974 (the first year for which we have reliable and complete data). We then measure the percentage change in each variable in each year. So, if voter turnout increases from 50 to 60 percent, this counts as a 20-point change for the purpose of calculating INCH. A change is counted as either positive or negative depending on whether the variable measures something good (like turnout) or bad (like crime).

The Relative Weight of the Variables

In constructing an index such as INCH, one must decide how to weigh each variable. We have given equal weight to five categories, each of which has several subcategories:

Political Components (20 percent) is composed of:

- turnout (10 percent), and
- other political activities (10 percent), which comprises:
  signing a petition, writing to Congress, attending rallies or speeches, working for a political party, making a speech, writing an article, writing a letter to a newspaper, belonging to a reform group, and running for or holding political office (1.1 percent each).

Trust (20 percent) is composed of:

- trust in others (10 percent), and
- confidence in the federal government (10 percent).

Membership (20 percent) is composed of:

- membership in at least one group and/or church attendance (6.7 percent),
- charitable contributions (6.7 percent), and
- local participation (6.7 percent), which comprises:
  attending local meetings, serving on local committees, and serving as an officer of a local group (2.2 percent each).

Security Components (20 percent) is composed of:

- youth murderers per youth population (6.7 percent),
- fear of crime (6.7 percent), and
- survey-reported crime per population (6.7 percent).

Family Components (20 percent) is composed of:

- divorce (10 percent), and
- non-marital births (10 percent).

(The total of the subcategories does not equal exactly 100 because of rounding.)

Our choice of weights is subject to challenge, but INCH is not very sensitive to the weighting scheme that one chooses. As explained in the Technical Appendix, we simulated what would happen if 10,000 people each devised a random scheme. Eighty percent of the results were similar to ours, and INCH never declined by less than 16 points between 1974 and 1994.

INCH

The Index of National Civic Health

The year 1974 is a baseline, set at 100. The graph shows change relative to that year. Components are graphed separately on the following pages.

INCH BEFORE 1974

We believe that civic health started to decline before 1974, but our information becomes less complete as we move back in time. For the years 1972-3, we have 19 of the 22 variables that are used to calculate INCH. Our data for the security components and "other political activities" begin in 1974, but we have reliable surrogate measures for 1972 and 1973. Only "local participation" must be estimated for these years.

Before 1972, our calculation of INCH is more tentative. We have used the following surrogate measures to start the graph in 1960.

Political Components

Turnout does not require a surrogate, since data are available for the whole period.

We have replaced the original seven "other political activities" with three series from the National Election Study (NES): "ever written a letter to a public official," "work for party or candidates," and "attend rally or political meeting." To fill the missing years, we have used linear fits. We have then adjusted the totals so that they average 100 in 1974.

Trust

For trust in others, we have used NES data instead of the General Social Survey's figures, and borrowed the 1960 figure from Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone." We have filled the gaps with straight lines.

For trust in government, all the data come from the NES.

Membership

For lack of data, we have held this whole category constant at 100.

Security Components

Official data on youth murderers/youth population begin in 1976. To estimate figures for earlier years, we used the annual change in the percentage of the juvenile population that was arrested for any crime during each year (calculated from FBI Uniform Crime Reports and Census Bureau population figures). This method assumes that the annual change in the youth murder rate was equal to the annual change in the overall youth crime rate. Although this assumption may be somewhat inaccurate, the possible error is small.

In place of survey-reported crime, we have used the annual rate of change in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, working back from 1974. The FBI has adjusted its past figures several times; we use the most recent data. This series is reported with gaps in the 1960s, but we have filled the gaps with straight lines.

Fear has been dropped for lack of data. But survey-reported crime correlated with fear (.81) during 1974 to 1994, so we count the crime rate twice.

Family Components

Divorce does not require a surrogate. Figures before 1965 include women 15 and under, who are excluded thereafter. But this change does not seem to affect the results at our level of precision.

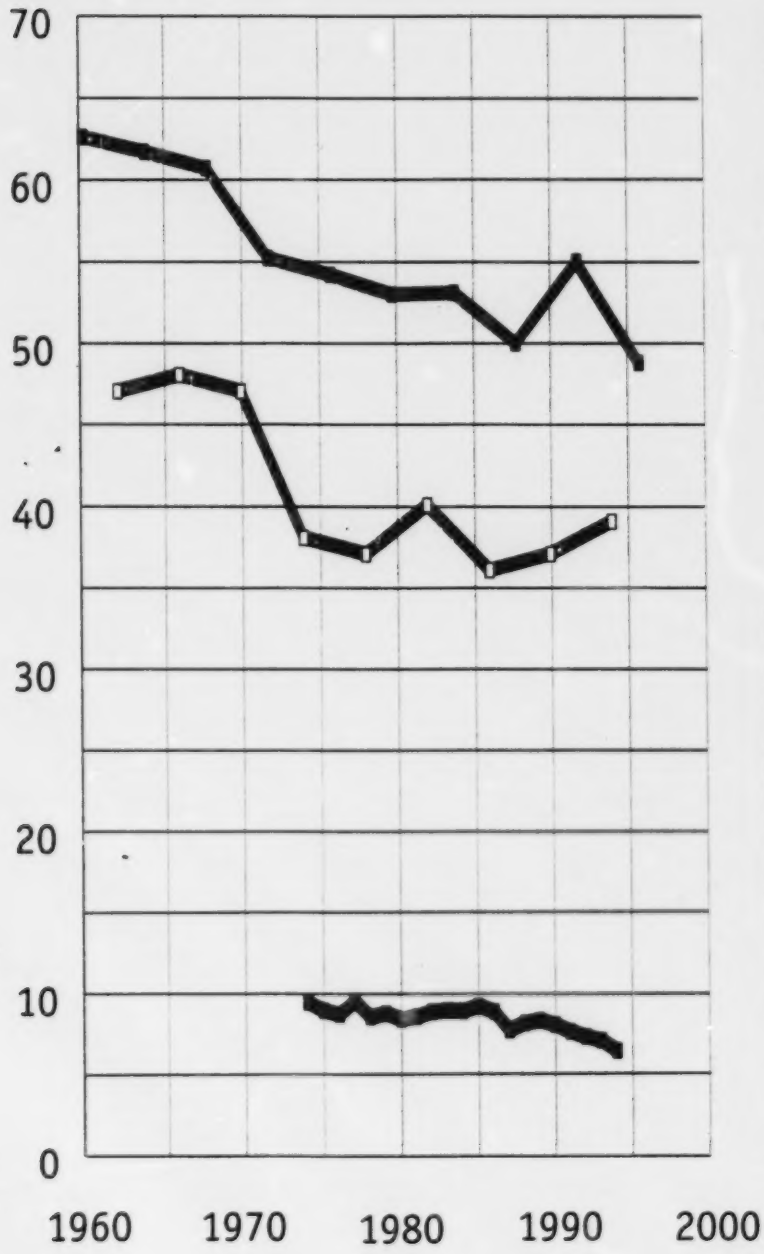
Non-marital births does not require a surrogate.

INCH

With Estimated Figures for 1960–1971

See Technical Appendix for the method of estimating.

INCH: *Political Components*



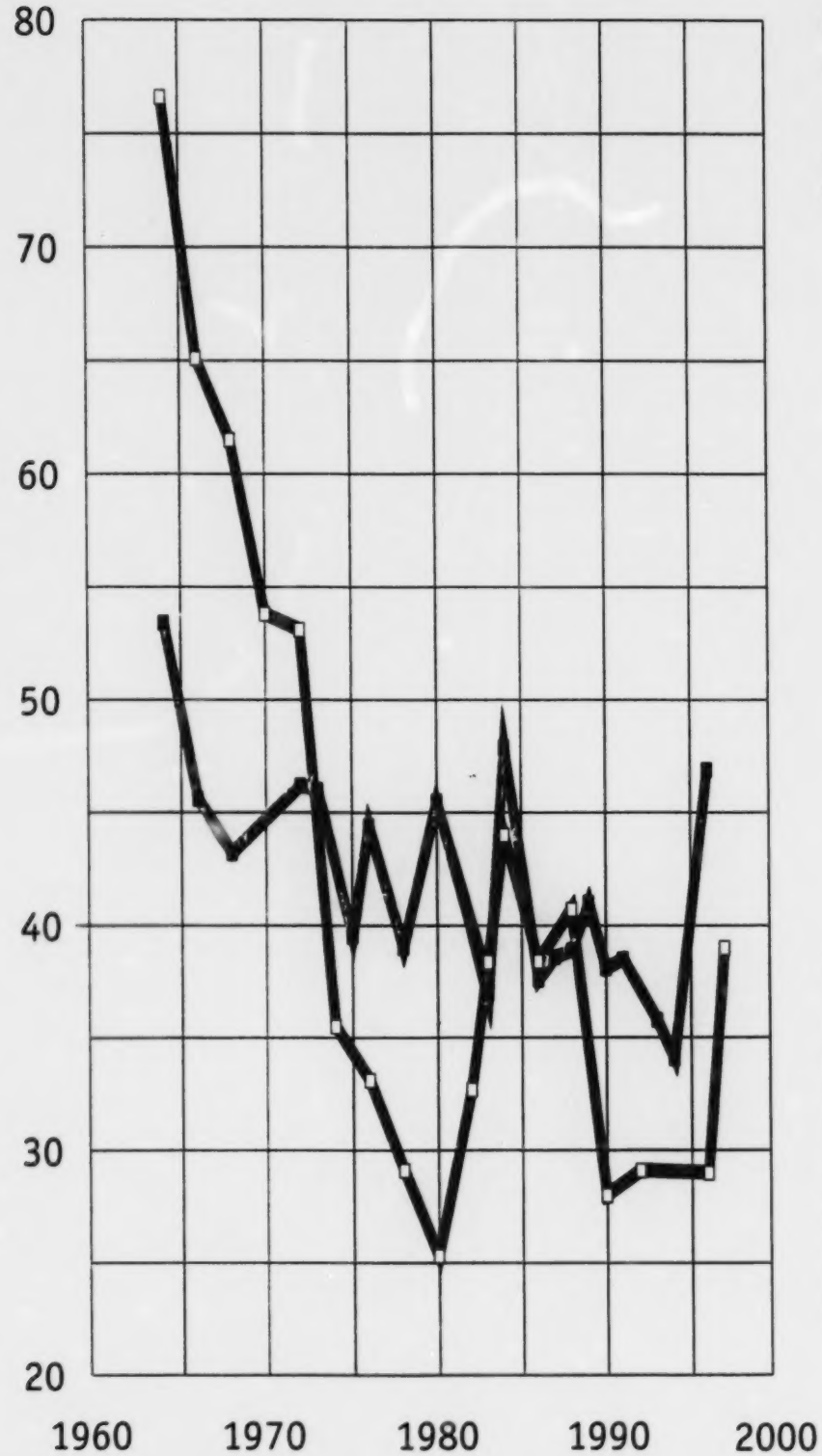
presidential election turnout

alternate year election turnout

other political activities

"Turnout" is the percentage of the voting-age population that voted. "Other political activities" is an average of: signing a petition, writing a Member of Congress, attending a political rally or speech, working for a political party, making a speech, writing an article, writing a letter to the newspaper, belonging to a reform group, and running for or holding public office. Sources: Federal Election Commission, Roper.

INCH: *Trust Components*



"Trust others" is the percentage of Americans who said that most people could be trusted most of the time (NES, GSS, AARP).
"Confidence in government" is the percentage who said that the government in Washington could be trusted to do the right thing usually or just about always (NES, AARP, Pew).

INCH: *Membership Components*

"Membership" means belonging to at least one group and/or attending religious services at least several times annually. "Local participation" is the average of: attending a local meeting, serving on a local committee, and serving as an officer of a local group. "Contributions" is the percentage of disposable income given to charity.
Sources: GSS, Roper, Statistical Almanac of the US.

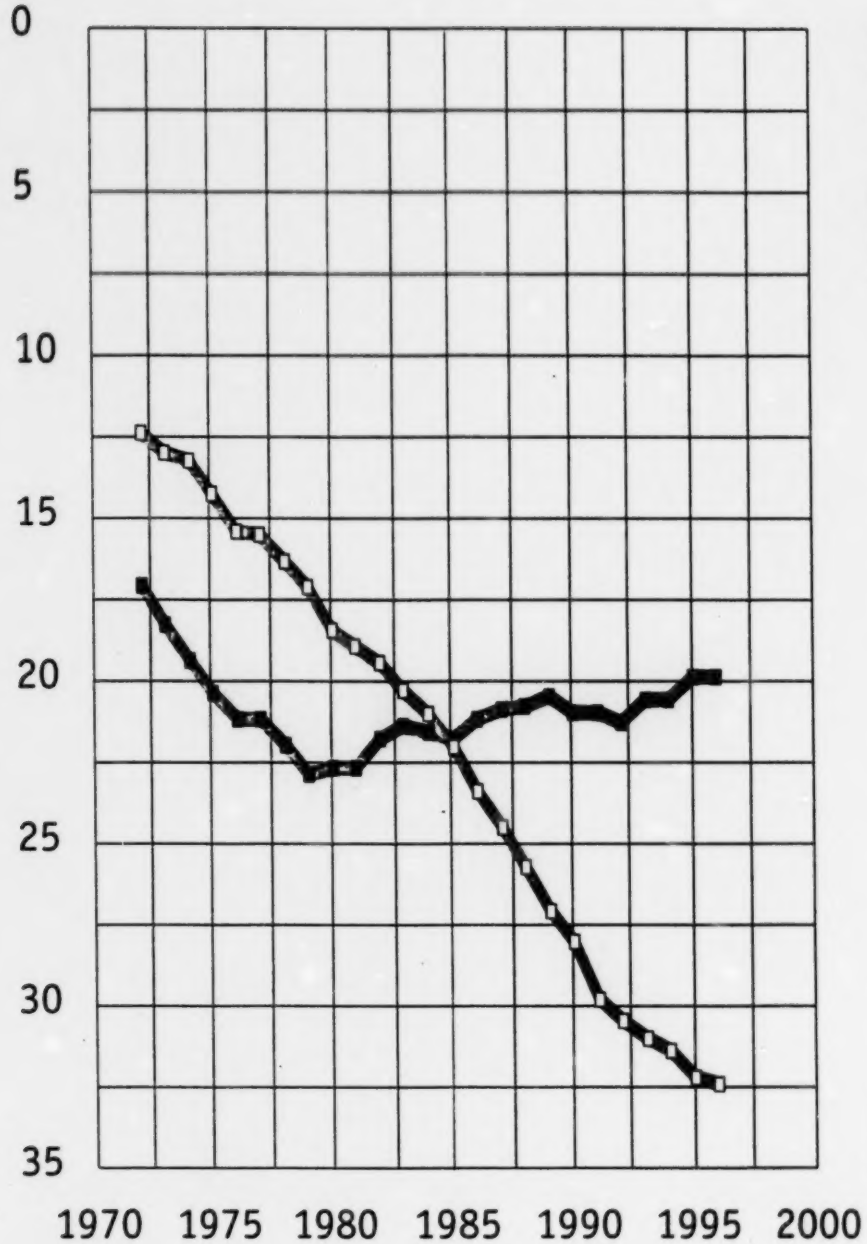
INCH: *Security Components*

(inverted scale)

"Crime" means violent crime.
"Survey-reported crime" also includes homicides from FBI supplementary reports.
"Youth" are people age 14–17.
"Fear" means the percentage of people who are afraid to walk alone near their homes at night.
Sources: FBI, Bureau of Justice Statistics, GSS, Roper.

INCH: *Family Components*

(inverted scale)



divorces/1,000 married women age 15+

non-marital births as % of total

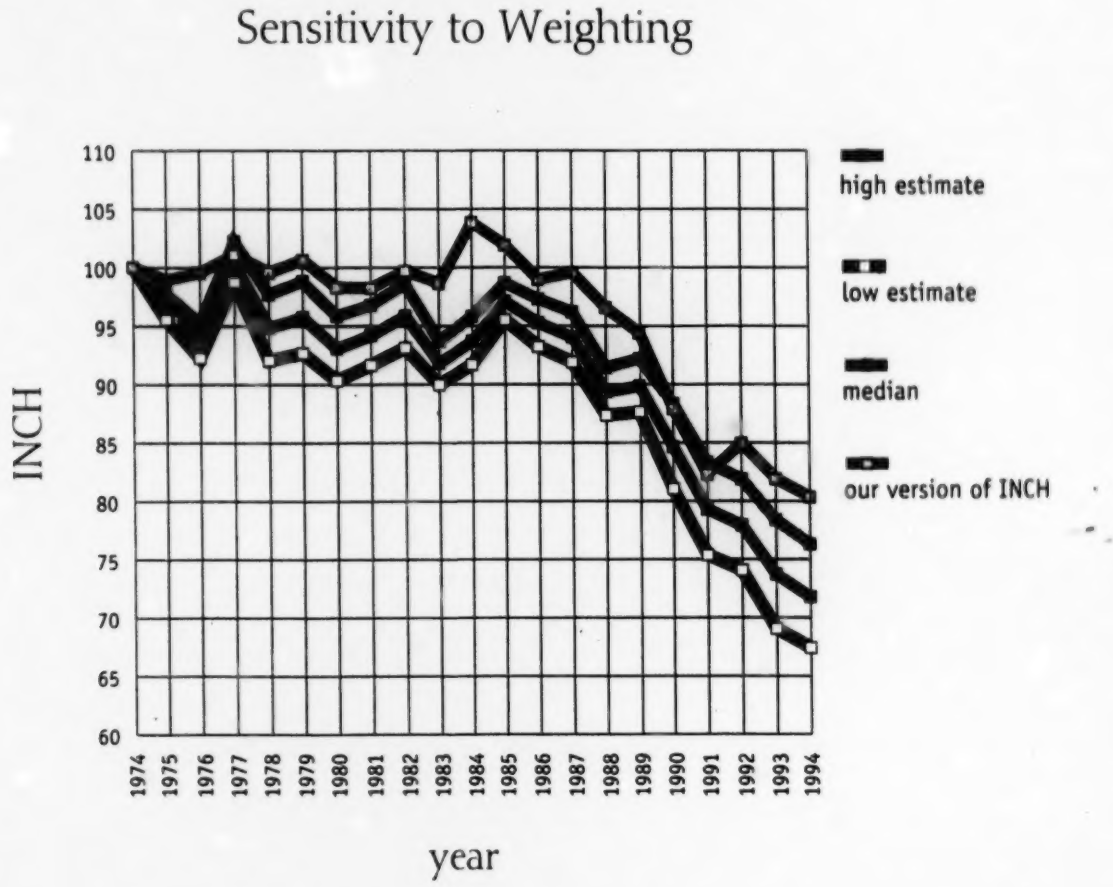
Sources: Statistical Almanac, U.S. National Center for Health Statistics.

Sensitivity to Weighting

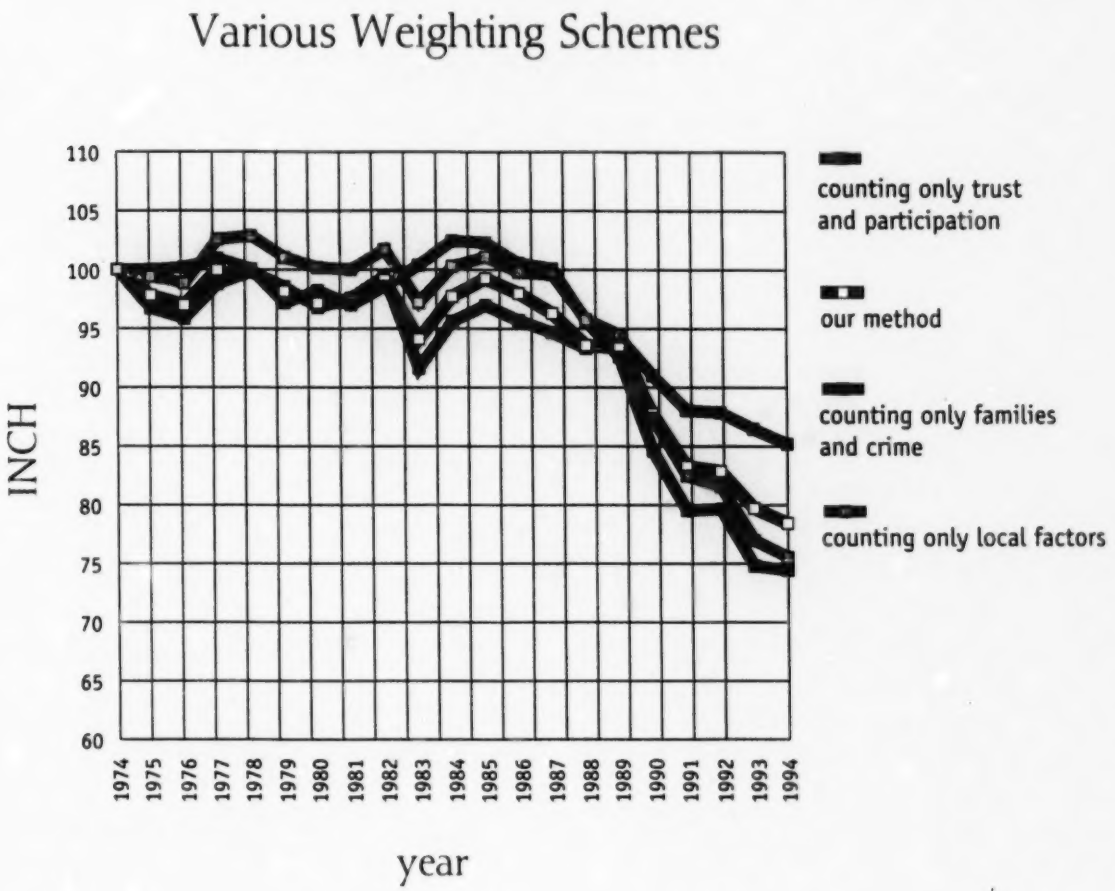
We have assigned weights to each of the 22 variables. To see how changes in the weighting scheme would affect INCH, we used the "Monte Carlo" method, which is often employed to evaluate the reliability of forecasts. We simulated what would happen if 10,000 people randomly distributed 100 "weighting points" among the 22 categories that make up INCH. In not one of these 10,000 trials did INCH fall by less than 16 points over twenty years; the average decline was 27.62 — or more than one point per year.[1]

If all the participants had plotted lines showing their versions of INCH, the results would have clustered tightly around a median. This graph shows our version of INCH; the average version; and two percentile lines. The percentile lines mark the bounds of the area within which 80 percent of the 10,000 simulated versions of INCH would fall.

The results of the trials are similar enough — over a long enough period — that the median represents a statistically significant trend.[2] Our version of INCH runs parallel to the median, but is somewhat higher. Indeed, our version is generally above the 90th-percentile line, which means that the vast majority of random schemes would produce a more pessimistic story than ours. (This is because we give low weights to each of the nine political activities, most of which have declined since 1974.) Thus, if we have erred, it is by underestimating the degree of decline: in other words, by *overestimating* INCH for most years.



Another way to test sensitivity is to imagine the weighting schemes that would appeal to various actual participants in the debate about civic health. This graph illustrates several schools of thought. Note again that the results do not vary much from our version of INCH.



To summarize, it is clear that civic health declined between 1974 and 1994, with most of the decline taking place in the second ten years. At least 99 percent of possible weighting schemes would support this conclusion. However, finer judgments depend on how one chooses to weigh the variables. So, for instance, it's only reasonable to say "civic health was 80.32 in 1994" if you have accepted our choice of weights. But even if you choose a very different scheme, your results will not vary from ours by more than nine points in 1994—and less in earlier years.

Indicators

The graphs of separate components show raw numbers, using a variety of scales. To make visual comparisons easier, the graphs have been constructed so that upward movement always indicates a change for the better.

Voter turnout numbers, from the Federal Election Commission, are actual voters divided by the voting-age population. This is the standard figure, even though there is some debate about the denominator: e.g., should felons and resident aliens be included? Although INCH starts in 1972, we have graphed turnout figures starting in 1960 in order to illustrate a major decline that occurred before our period.

Other political activities measures activities that are as important as voting and that may lead people to vote. For the purpose of calculating INCH, we have used nine separate variables: the percentage of people who say that within the last year they have signed a petition, written to a Member of Congress, attended a political rally or speech, worked for a political party, written an article, written a letter to the newspaper, made a speech, belonged to a reform group, and run for — or held — political office. Rosenstone and Hanson find that these questions elicit many more positive responses if they are asked during the summer rather than in the winter. This suggests "that survey respondents did not think back a full year, as they were asked, in answering Roper questions."[5] To compensate, we have used moving annual averages of Roper surveys, as calculated by Robert Putnam. The component graph shows the mean of these nine variables.

Trust the federal government is the percentage of people who said that they trusted the government in Washington to do the right thing all of the time or just about always. Again, we have started the graph in 1960 to illustrate the massive decline that occurred before the INCH period.

Trust others is the percentage of people who said that most people can be trusted most of the time.

Membership is the percentage of people who belong to at least one of fifteen specified types of voluntary group – or to any "other" association – plus people who do not belong to any group at all but do attend religious services at least several times a year. We have used church and synagogue *attendance* rather than *membership* because the GSS's list of specified groups does not include religious congregations. (Church-affiliated organizations are on the list, however.) The GSS asked directly about religious membership in one year, 1988. That year, 83.9 percent of church or synagogue members attended services at least several times annually, and 80 percent of regular attendees were congregational members. This means that attendance is a reasonable proxy for membership. Furthermore, GSS statistics on regular attendance are similar to Gallup statistics on congregational membership:

year	1975	1980	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
Gallup church membership	71	69	69	68	71	69	69	65	68	65	68	69	69
GSS attendance	65.3	65.4	65.6	67.9	63.5	66.2	69.5	64.1	63.4	65.7	64.7	62.5	61.8

Whereas we report the percentage who belong to any one group, Putnam based his "Bowling Alone" argument on the average number of memberships per person since 1972. Many questions have been raised about this figure (which is aggregated from GSS data). In addition to the strictly statistical problems, critics have argued that not all associations are equally participatory or relevant — so an aggregate figure may not mean much. That is why we have included separate components for "local participation" and "other political activities." But the GSS data do reveal how many people belong to *no* organizations at all. This is a rough measure of social isolation, which we have adjusted to account for church and synagogue attendance.

Local participation measures civic activities that are not necessarily political: attending a meeting on town or school affairs; serving on a committee of a local organization; and serving as an officer of a club or organization. Each figure is the percentage of adult Americans who said that they performed the activity in question at least once within the preceding year. Roper polls are the source. Again, we use annual averages to compensate for seasonal variations.

Charitable contributions: This is our own figure. We have divided disposable personal income by an estimate of itemized charitable deductions. We have borrowed this estimate from the *Statistical Almanac of the United States* which uses a combination of IRS reports, survey data by Independent Sector, and (for years prior to 1986) an econometric model.

Youth murderers/100,000 youth refers to the number of children aged 14-17 who are convicted of murder. Figures for 1976-94 have been calculated by James Alan Fox for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Before 1976, disaggregated youth murder rates were not calculated. But we have a surrogate measure: the percentage of the juvenile population arrested for any crime.

Fear is the percentage of people who say that they are afraid to walk alone at night within one mile of their homes. The source is the Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, which relies on GSS and Roper polls.

Survey-reported crime/1,000 population is actually a measure of violent crime: homicide, rape, robbery, and assault. Because these statistics are drawn from surveys of victims, they cannot include murder. But the Bureau of Justice Statistics adds homicide statistics from the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports.

Non-marital births as percent of total means births to unmarried women as a fraction of total births. Note again that the graph's scale is inverted.

Divorces per 1,000 women age 15+ is a figure published annually by the U.S National Center for Health Statistics.

Specific Aggregation Problems

Some of the variables cannot be aggregated until specific problems are addressed. First, federal election turnout figures move in a four-year cycle that has nothing to do with "civic health." Participation naturally peaks in presidential years, declines in other even-numbered years, and falls to zero the rest of the time. For the purpose of calculating INCH, we have used a four-year moving average of turnout. Thus the turnout figure for any year is an average of the most recent congressional and presidential races: a statistical construct, but a meaningful one.

Second, INCH will move arbitrarily if a single variable is omitted in any year. Unfortunately, the GSS has not asked trust questions with perfect regularity. The NES, which surveys confidence in government, is conducted biannually. Gallup hasn't always asked questions about fear of crime. And the government did not publish annual totals for charitable contributions consistently until 1985. To fill the missing points in these three series, we have used straight lines. We have also used extrapolations to fill a few other, miscellaneous data points. Since the variables in question do not shift very much, the potential for error is small.

NOTES

1 With a standard deviation of 3.5 and a mean standard error of 0.04.

2 Using weighted least squares analysis, $F(1, 18) = 62.01$. Prob > F = 0. If the 20-year period is split in half, the trend is only significant during the second half (1984-1994), when the decline is steep. For 1984-1994, $F(1, 8) = 406.38$. Prob > F = 0. For 1974-1984, $F(1, 8) = 2.58$. Prob > F = 0.1472.

3 Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hanson, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 67, note 21.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Themes and History

CIVIL SOCIETY: THEMES AND HISTORY

Voluntary Associations and Civil Society

Revitalizing our civic health requires enlisting the institutions of all three sectors of our society: government, the market, and "civil society" — the network of voluntary associations and activities that has long been thought to constitute a principal source of America's distinctiveness and strength. The National Commission has focused considerable attention on trends and conditions in our civil society, its connections with the public and private sectors, and its impact on civic renewal.

For centuries, foreign visitors to America have been struck by the variety and vitality of our voluntary institutions. This distinctive habit of associating grew in part out of our traditions of limited government, which circumscribed the reach of state action at all levels; and in part out of our political and social egalitarianism, which allowed individuals of all stations to mingle and work together in common endeavors. Finally, the vibrancy of American civil society was in part an artifact of our tradition of church-state separation. The disestablishment of religion in our early national history put church support—and the influence that goes with support—in the hands of church members imbued with the spirit of congregationalism. This "empowerment of the religious laity," notes one historian, "had the unexpected consequence of empowering women, not only because women constituted a majority of church members, but also because, beginning in the 1820s, women were able to form vigorous pan-Protestant lay organizations, which challenged the authority of ministers and generated an autonomous social agenda."[1] Throughout the nineteenth century, women's groups constituted one of the most vigorous components of American civil society, a phenomenon that carried over to this century as well.

The proclivity to associate still characterizes American life. The associations of our civil society range from churches to soccer leagues to reading circles to social movements, from colleges to symphony orchestras to volunteer fire departments. They encompass highly organized national federations and casually informal local groups. They are as large as the AARP and as small as neighborhood crime watches. They produce an amazing array of goods — everything from academic research to community safety to companionship to medical care to spiritual guidance.

Government and Civil Society

Throughout our history, the relationship between government and civil society has been complex. Government activity sometimes catalyzes and strengthens civil associations, but at other times stunts or distorts them. The growth of voluntary associations in the nineteenth century was spurred by limitations on government activity imposed by the courts and tradition, limitations that some private associations sought to overcome by pushing for new models of public responsibility.[2] The subsequent growth of the state did not always diminish voluntary association, however, but often led to various public-private partnerships.[3]

From early on, the line between private and public was blurred. In the 1870s, private charities for poor children in New York often received half or more of their funding from state and local governments.[4] This was not an anomalous arrangement; towns and cities had been providing grants to private charities since the early national period.[5] In our own times, expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s and '70s was accompanied by an expansion, not contraction, of the nonprofit sector.[6] In expanding its responsibilities, the government looked to existing or newly created private organizations to deliver services.

If the relationship between state and civil society often has been positive and mutually supportive, often it has not. The state can become a menace to civil society, either by seeking to preempt private or local activity, or by deforming it. The period of social welfare legislation of the 1960s and

'70s illustrates the double-sidedness of government-private relationships. While nonprofits proliferated, seemingly a happy consequence for civil society, these new organizations "often were not well-connected to their community. Government funding encouraged [them] to focus their attention on government policy and influencing government rate-setting and regulatory procedures rather than cultivating extensive community ties. Many nonprofit service agencies had large budgets but almost no ongoing connections to their communities except to provide a service to targeted clients or individuals."[7] Moreover, the growth of state power over the last century has meant a parallel growth in bureaucracies whose professional managers and scientific experts assume control over affairs once left to local political or community decision. This centralization of decision-making into the hands of trained experts has sometimes weakened local community structures, and not always inadvertently. Regrettably, some experts and national leaders have viewed the "local" as parochial, unprogressive, and backward.[8]

Markets and Civil Society

The relationship between business corporations and civil society is equally complex. In freely operating market economies such as ours, firms have made (and will always make) locational and employment decisions based on their own advantage. In earlier parts of this century, however, major firms typically remained in specific communities for decades, and their executives took a civic interest in those communities. Business leaders were among the leading organizers of city philanthropies and civic improvement leagues, and their firms supplied much-needed funding for important voluntary enterprises.

Today, however, changes in the structure of the economy—information technology and global capital flows—have significantly weakened links between corporations and localities. The incentives to consider the effects of corporate decisions (including downsizing and relocation) on neighborhoods and communities have correspondingly diminished. These shifts raise difficult questions about the appropriate redefinition of corporate civic responsibility within the new economy.

Even broader questions can be raised about the relationship between the market sector and civil society. There can be little doubt that free markets help sustain a zone of personal liberty that bolsters the capacities of individuals to associate for civic purposes. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that the operation of market forces will prove wholly compatible with the requirements of civic health. For example, many Americans believe that the market-driven decisions of giant media corporations have diminished the quality of our public culture and have greatly complicated the task of raising children.

The Value of Civil Society

In producing the many goods they do, the associations of civil society generate such especially valuable byproducts as social trust, political competence, and civic spirit. This last point is central to a number of recent studies of civil society. Robert Putnam's now-famous essay, "Bowling Alone," argues that "the quality of public life and the performance of social institutions . . . are powerfully influenced by norms and networks of civic engagement."[9] According to Putnam, "networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust."[10] These outcomes are not the goals of associational life, but byproducts. For example, bowling leagues arise not to produce "social capital" but to promote participation and competition in a particular sport. Similarly, families (the most fundamental form of social capital, notes Putnam[11]) form to provide a structure for companionship and child-rearing, not to advance a broader social good. Nevertheless, the byproducts that such associations generate are vital for collective life in general. Political activity, social and economic cooperation, and neighborhood comity all are promoted by the interactions of individuals in their clubs, leagues, organizations, and families.

The attention of other academics and scholars has followed a similar course. There is an increased recognition that within the "little platoons" of social life—families, schools, and community organizations—children acquire (or fail to acquire) the moral dispositions that make them, as adults, cooperating neighbors, industrious and trustworthy workers, active citizens, and, in their turn, responsible and loving parents.

While civil society's virtue-fostering functions are vitally important, they are only part of a larger general moral conversation that civil society makes possible. Most of the associations of civil society — whether sports clubs, charities, private schools, museums, churches, families, or the like — seek to put into practice, or propagate, some pattern of life or ideal of conduct that they believe objectively valuable. Within and among these associations, individuals debate and argue about the goals worthy of pursuit.

These individual and group activities within civil society are important in themselves, as expressions of human freedom. Indeed, a key function of civil society is to defend freedom against external threats — including the power of the state. But these civil conversations can also merge into ongoing political debates about social justice and the common good. Social movements frequently arise within civil society, giving voice to new publics and promoting new causes and political identities.[12] Established publics continually draw upon the ideas and ideals offered by religious, philanthropic, intellectual, and community-improvement institutions. At the same time, organs of mass communication — newspapers, magazines, television, radio — permit wide cross-communication among different audiences and the consequent formation of "public opinion." The emergence in the eighteenth century of civil society as an autonomous realm of public opinion, in which individuals — no longer under the tutelage of Crown or Church — could think for themselves, was (and remains) the essential precondition of political democracy.[13]

Civil society, in the words of one commentator, is "the free space in which democratic attitudes are cultivated and democratic behavior is conditioned."[14] But why should there be such an obvious linkage between free associations and political democracy? The goods various groups seek to produce might, in principle, be hostile to the flourishing of other groups and contemptuous of democratic values. Commentators on civil society find themselves in sharp conflict over "congruence" — the idea that the internal structures and norms of voluntary associations should (or must) be democratic, participatory, and civil if they are to promote broader societal aims of political democracy.[15]

Although civil society is independent of state and market, it is not unaffected by them. Our voluntary associations are embedded in a particular political structure and economic order whose norms, expressed in public law and procedures, inevitably shape and temper the values and goals of families, clubs, philanthropies, parties, and churches. Even internally undemocratic organizations committed to objectives at odds with democratic values typically function in our system more as "loyal opposition" than as hostile centers of subversion and destruction. Thus, the components of our civil society have already accommodated themselves in greater or lesser degree to the forms of government and economy that enframe them.[16] This fact points up the importance to civil society of the political and personal rights that protect freedom of exchange and association and encourage democratic action.[17]

The discussion of civil society has recently moved out of the academy and into the center of American political debate. A number of trends have converged to produce this (to some) surprising development.

■ First, many people, disillusioned with centralized governmental programs that deal with poverty, joblessness, crime, drug addiction, and community decay, now look to the institutions of civil society as the preferred agents for addressing these problems. In their view, private, community-based organizations are more flexible than large-scale government programs, better able to tailor their activities to community needs and circumstances. On the other hand, many of those actually engaged in local civic renewal efforts believe that they will be most effective if they act in partnership with government, as well as with foundations and corporations. As Rev. Eugene Rivers of Boston has said, "Without public support and back-up, financial and logistical, there's no way churches or other community folk can turn the tide. But if we learn how to work together, then there's no limit to what can be accomplished before it's too late."[18]

■ Second, many people now look to civil society for regeneration of political life in America. In the context of declining political participation and increasing distance from (and disdain for) politics, the institutions of civil society strike many as particularly attractive, either as possible sources for renewing the civic spirit of individuals and prompting them to greater engagement with political life, or as alternative sites of self-government where individuals can organize more effectively to solve community problems.

■ Third, and more generally, people increasingly appreciate the private, voluntary sector of associational life as a vital source of personal meaning. While it is true that civil society as a whole can seem to individuals a terribly fractious and cacophonous arena, charged with cultural conflict, civil society is where people, by and large, lead their lives when they are not working. The associations of civil society—churches, clubs, unions, and many others—provide people with spiritual and moral "homes."

NOTES

1 Kathryn Kish Sklar, "An Historical Model of Women's Voluntarism and the State, 1890-1920," Working Paper #8 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1997), pp. 3-4. See also Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Religion, Philanthropy, and Political Culture," Working Paper #11 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1998), pp. 6-11.

2 Sklar, "An Historical Model of Women's Voluntarism," p. 9.

3 Theda Skocpol, Testimony to the First Plenary Session, National Commission on Civic Renewal, January 25, 1997.

4 Lester M. Salamon, *Holding the Center: America's Nonprofit Sector at a Crossroads* (New York: Nathan Cummings Foundation, 1997), p. 13.

5 McCarthy, "Religion, Philanthropy, and Political Culture," p. 9.

6 Steven Rathgeb Smith, "Civic Infrastructure in America: The Interrelationship Between Government and Voluntary Associations," Working Paper #7 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1997).

7 Smith, "Civic Infrastructure," p. 12.

8 See William Schambra, "Is There Civic Life Beyond the Great National Community?" Working Paper #5 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1997). See also Benjamin Barber, "Clansmen, Consumers and Citizens: Three Takes on Civil Society," Working Paper #4 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1997), p. 28 (noting government's "tendency . . . to think its job is to govern on behalf of citizens instead of facilitating their own self-government").

9 Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995), p. 66.

10 Ibid., p. 67.

11 Ibid., p. 73.

12 As Jean Cohen notes, the purportedly "uncivic" generation that came of age in the 1960s and '70s "created the first consumers' movement since the 1930s, the first environmental movement since the turn of the century, public health movements, grassroots activism and community organizing, the most important feminist movement since the pre-WWI period, the civil rights movement, and innumerable NGOs and civic movements, all of which have led to unprecedented advances in rights and social justice." See Jean Cohen, "American Civil Society Talk," Working Paper #8 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal), p. 24.

13 See Cohen, "American Civil Society Talk," and Charles Taylor, "Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere: Parts I and II," *Civic Arts Review* 9 (Spring and Summer/Fall, 1996).

14 Barber, "Clansmen, Consumers and Citizens," p. 1. For a more extended discussion, see Sara M. Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Civic Change in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

15 Ibid., pp. 6-8.

16 That is why it is a mistake to think that "civil society" — meaning free markets and private associations — will automatically lead Russia and Eastern Europe from totalitarianism to democracy. The rock of civil society in Russia, for example, has not been shaped by three hundred years of the steady waterdrops of democratic action but by a thousand years of autocracy. The Catholic Church is an asset to democracy in the United States; the Russian Orthodox Church may or may not prove to be an asset to liberal democracy in the new Russia. See Xiaorong Li, "From Civil Society to Democracy: A Critique of Civil Society Determinism," Working Paper #14 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1998).

17 See Cohen, "Civil Society Talk," pp. 19, 40.

18 Quoted in DiIulio, "The Lord's Work," p. 31.

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CIVIL SOCIETY

Evidence

CIVIL SOCIETY: EVIDENCE

The Condition of U.S. Civil Society

The publication of Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone" in 1995 sparked a vigorous but often murky debate about trends in America's voluntary sector, and about the implications of these trends for our overall civic life. Some of the confusion arises from the inconclusiveness of the available data, and some from a failure to draw certain basic distinctions.

Voluntary sector activities include formal organizational membership, volunteering, charitable giving, and informal socializing. Evidence suggests that trends in these areas may be diverging. Moreover, civic trends have not been linear during the past generation. Some declines that began in the 1970s — in aggregate group membership, volunteering, and philanthropy — appear to have halted and even reversed themselves in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Judged against other industrialized nations, American civil society remains comparatively strong (though its relative standing may have fallen in recent decades). According to the 1990-91 World Values Survey, 82 percent of Americans belong to at least one voluntary association, a rate exceeded only in Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Furthermore, Americans belong to (and volunteer for) almost all types of groups at above-average rates. Only unions are relatively weak in the United States.[1]

In 1997, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found in a nationwide poll that the average American belongs to 4.2 voluntary groups.[2] Two years earlier, an Independent Sector study found that almost 70 percent of American households made charitable contributions annually, and that just short of half of the population volunteered. Those who did volunteer work in 1995 said that they gave an average of four hours of their time every week.[3] There are reasons to be concerned about the trends in civil society over time, but it would be wrong to assume that Americans have ceased to join or support voluntary groups.

Still, there is no evidence that the average rate of membership has *increased* in the last quarter century. This is a surprise, because it is widely believed that rising levels of education are linked to greater associational activity. In fact, it appears that two trends over the past quarter century have roughly counterbalanced each other: the proportion of high school and college graduates in the population has grown larger, but civic participation at every educational level has declined. People with high school diplomas but no college education have become about 32 percent less likely to join any associations, while there has been a modest increase in the proportion of people who belong to no organizations at all.

Trends among racial and ethnic groups reflect their distinctive history and condition. To take just one example, African Americans have traditionally combined formal political acts, such as registering people to vote, with group membership and protest tactics. Overall, there has been little decline in these forms of civic engagement since the "activist" 1960s. But African Americans have typically *shifted* their attention from civil rights struggles to quality-of-life issues in local communities. And African Americans without much formal education have, like their white counterparts, largely dropped out of community-oriented activities as well as formal political life.[4]

Another way to break down aggregate measures of civil society is to look at types of organizations. Most categories have seen little change since 1972, when the General Social Survey first asked relevant poll questions. For instance, religious associations, sports leagues, and youth organizations have had stable membership levels. However, millions of people have left labor unions and fraternal societies such as the Elks and Masons, and similar numbers have joined professional associations. Membership in school service groups has substantially increased, perhaps because of recent efforts to link community service and learning. Finally, there has been a huge shift from mainline Protestant churches to evangelical and fundamentalist denominations.

Associations and Democracy

These changes may prove significant for the future of democracy in America. Throughout American history, voluntary associations have been valued because they are thought to build civic virtue, foster trust, encourage cooperation, and promote political participation. But on closer inspection, it turns out that not all associations promote democratic health in the same way or to the same extent.

■ **Unions**, for instance, are important sources of solidarity among working people. They have core functions that attract members, but they offer social activities, information, and mutual assistance as well. They also offer a measure of political power to workers, thereby increasing pluralism and encouraging participation. Members of union households are 8 percent more likely than other people to vote. Though union membership is a relatively weak predictor of overall associational membership,[5] unionized workers do join more voluntary organizations and make more charitable contributions than other people do.[6] The dramatic decline in union membership over the past 40 years has been exacerbated by factors—automation, international competition, the relocation of factories to non-union states, and changes in federal labor law enforcement—that do not directly affect other associations. The United States now ranks near the bottom of industrialized democracies in union membership.

■ **Fraternal organizations and women's auxiliaries** have suffered deep losses in membership since 1974. These groups traditionally had deep roots in their communities, and they offered men and women of different classes an opportunity to talk and cooperate more or less as equals—something that professional associations, which have grown in recent decades, do not do. Today, it is not clear what (if anything) will replace the cross-class local organizations that flourished through most of American history.[7]

■ **Church-affiliated groups** are the backbone of civil society in America, involving almost half the population (compared with just 13 percent in the average industrialized democracy). Religious associations offer ways for people to give money, receive aid, hold meetings, recruit members for other associations, and learn about public issues. They are especially valuable for people with little income or education, who tend not to join other groups.[8] Surveys show that membership in such groups correlates with voting, volunteering, charity, and political activity.

■ **Evangelical denominations** are no exception. The experience, values, and personal networks that they develop transfer easily to politics. They have little hierarchy, and they demand intense participation from their members. For example, as part of their church activities, Baptists are much more likely to plan meetings and make presentations than are Catholics. (Counterbalancing this is the historic Catholic emphasis on social solidarity and "subsidiarity"—the principle that issues should be addressed as directly and locally as their substance permits, and by the smallest unit of social organization possible.) The growth of evangelical denominations has introduced many people, especially lower-income people, to the political process and given them powerful tools for mutual aid.

Fundamentalist denominations encourage the faithful to rely on one another. But increased mutual reliance and trust *within* groups is not necessarily correlated with increased trust *among* groups. The link between fervent civic participation and generalized social or political trust is not always strong.

■ **Mailing-list associations**, from the National Rifle Association to the Children's Defense Fund, have grown since 1970. Members of these groups contribute dues to support professional staff, but they do not donate much time or effort. It seems plausible that writing a check has a smaller effect on the development of civic skills, knowledge, and interpersonal trust than does attending a meeting or organizing a grassroots movement.

But mailing-list organizations should not be stereotyped. The Sierra Club, for example, has been described as a group whose members merely write checks and read newsletters. But in one May weekend, the Los Angeles chapter alone organized 39 events, from classes to camping excursions, that were cooperative and participatory.[9]

The controversy over contemporary national check-writing associations raises broader historical and political issues about the relationship between top-down and bottom-up organizational structures. Classic voluntary associations such as the PTA and the American Legion were effective in part because they succeeded in creating both vigorous national lobbying arms and vital chapters or affiliates at the state and local level, with close communication between the various tiers.[10] But even pure mailing-list organizations can be effective political actors, thereby freeing members to perform other civic tasks.

Still, a large shift from grassroots groups to national membership organizations provides grounds for concern. The evidence suggests that while levels of group membership have remained fairly constant during the last quarter century, active involvement and leadership have become less common, in part because the kinds of organizations that now predominate offer relatively few opportunities for participation and deliberation. Similarly, there has been a shift from groups that are organized in communities to those that unite people around a profession or interest. Both trends could be expected to lower social capital, even given fairly constant overall membership levels. Indeed, the past 25 years have seen a marked decline in the share of people who belong to committees and serve as officers of local groups, a trend that parallels declines in such forms of local political activity as attending school board meetings and participating in political parties.

Recent scholarship suggests complex links between associational activities and key political variables such as political participation, social trust, and confidence in government. Controlling for education and income, members of faith-based groups, neighborhood groups, and sports leagues are especially likely to follow politics and vote—a correlation that supports the hypothesis that political participation is significantly more attractive for individuals who belong to social networks. It's not hard to see why. Making a meaningful decision at the polls requires a big investment of time and attention. Because members of voluntary groups have many opportunities to discuss politics, they can easily acquire information, and they are sometimes persuaded to vote by other members or by local politicians and activists who gravitate to organizations. By urging fellow members to support particular candidates or causes, citizens can multiply their political power.

Most studies that use the General Social Survey or other large data sets find that associational membership is linked to trust in other citizens. This is not surprising, because people are unlikely to donate time or money unless they trust others, and cooperative activities can further boost their social trust. Not only do trusting people belong to organizations at a relatively high rate, but they tend to choose groups that offer (in Robert Wuthnow's phrase) "more intimate and encompassing interaction."

However, researchers differ on the strength of the relationship between trust and membership, and on the causal relationship between them. For instance, Eric Uslaner has argued that both trust and membership simply reflect optimism; the direct relationship is weak. A national survey by the AARP found only a modest correlation between social trust and group membership, and no correlation between membership and trust in the national government. And a recent poll of Philadelphians by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found no strong direct link between the two variables. Nevertheless, Philadelphians who believed that they could "make a difference" tended to be trusting; they were also especially likely to volunteer.[11]

Interpersonal trust and confidence in government also tend to go together. Some research suggests that disenchantment with official institutions is an important cause of wariness towards other people. When political leaders let us down, we draw negative conclusions about human nature in general.[12] The reverse is presumably true as well: wariness towards other people (stemming from crime, family dysfunction, and other sources) may affect our confidence in politicians.

Trust in government has fallen more precipitously than interpersonal trust. Much of the decline took place in 1963-75, an era defined largely by Vietnam and Watergate. And perhaps, to a significant

extent, the decline was justified. But there now exists, at least at the extremes, evidence of paranoia rather than healthy distrust. According to a recent study by the University of Virginia's Post-Modernity Project, a fifth of Americans believe that the governing elite is "involved in a conspiracy." Widespread fear of major public institutions not only creates generalized distrust — thereby discouraging group membership — but may also cause people to favor exclusive and inward-looking organizations. As noted by Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, excessive cynicism about politics and government may well discourage voting and other forms of political participation.[15] A presumption that politicians are unworthy keeps many honorable people out of the field. And a belief in conspiracies prevents citizens from making critical distinctions among leaders, organizations, and ideologies.

While the evidence now available does not permit firm conclusions about the overall condition of associational life in America, it appears that voluntary activities are on balance healthier than are formal political institutions and processes. Indeed, many citizens—particularly the youngest—seem to be shifting their preferred civic involvement from official politics to the voluntary sector. Local civic life, far from acting as a school for wider political involvement, may increasingly serve as a refuge from (and alternative to) it. If this trend continues, the consequences for the future of our democracy could be significant.

NOTES

1 Existing methods for determining and comparing rates of group membership are far from perfect. For example, surveys have not typically asked people how *many* associations they belong to. Instead, they have asked whether people belong to various *types* of groups, and answers to these questions have been aggregated to produce a total number of memberships. This aggregate figure is potentially misleading because an individual may belong to several groups of a particular type.

Indeed, the more categories a poll asks about, the higher the level of membership it finds. In the interests of consistency, the General Social Survey has repeatedly asked about a fixed list of associational types. (It is the only poll that provides comparable data on this question over time.) But Americans may have increasingly concentrated their memberships within certain GSS categories, producing a rising underestimate of group membership.

Critics have identified two additional problems with established survey instruments. First, because questions about associational membership have only been asked since 1972, it is hard to know whether aggregate group membership declined prior to that time—a matter of some importance. Second, static survey instruments such as the GSS are unlikely to have captured important recent changes in U.S. associational life — for example, the proliferation of faith-based informal "small groups" that Robert Wuthnow has documented.

2 Thomas M. Guterbock and John C. Fries, "Maintaining America's Social Fabric: The AARP Survey of Civic Involvement" (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Retired Persons, 1997), p. 50.

3 Virginia A. Hodgkinson, Murray S. Weitzman, et al., *Giving and Volunteering in the United States: Findings from a National Survey* (Independent Sector, 1996), p. 2.

4 Fredrick C. Harris, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken? The Erosion and Transformation of African American Civic Life," Working Paper #9 (College Park, Md.: National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1997).

5 John Brehm and Wendy Rahn, "Individual Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital." Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Commission on Civic Renewal, and the Brookings Institution, November 25, 1996.

6 Eric Uslaner, "Social Capital, Television, and the 'Mean World:'" Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Commission on Civic Renewal, and the Brookings Institution, November 25, 1996.

7 Theda Skocpol, "Unraveling from Above," *American Prospect*, March-April 1996, pp. 20-25.

8 Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

9 George Pettinico, "Civic Participation: Alive and Well in Today's Environmental Groups," *Public Perspective*, June-July 1996.

10 Skocpol, "Unraveling from Above."

11 The AARP survey found only a modest correlation between social trust and organizational membership.

12 Brehm and Rahn, "Individual Level Evidence."

13 Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

CIVIC STORIES

CIVIC STORIES

At its second plenary session in May 1997, the National Commission heard from citizens and leaders whose organizations promote family stability, youth development, local voluntarism, civic education, and community mobilization. Many of these witnesses spoke of how important it is to publicize civic stories, which can offer people in other communities practical guidance as well as an expanded sense of possibility. With this goal in mind, we offer descriptions of groups that appeared before the National Commission and excerpts from the testimony they presented. This presentation should not, however, be construed to imply blanket endorsement of these organizations and activities.

A number of organizations have also created information clearinghouses or news sources to identify and encourage civic renewal efforts. These include:

Center for Civic Education
5146 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302-1467

phone: (818) 591-9321
FAX: (818) 591-9330
e-mail: center4civ@aol.com
Web site: http://www.civiced.org

Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
130 Humphrey Center
301 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455

phone: (612) 625-0142
FAX: (612) 625-3513
e-mail: eeschenbacher@hhh.umn.edu
Web site: http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/cdc

Center for Living Democracy/American News Service (ANS)
289 Fox Farm Road
Brattleboro, VT 05301

phone: (800) 654-NEWS
FAX: (802) 254-1227
e-mail: info@americannews.com
Web site: http://www.americannews.com

Character Education Partnership
918 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

phone: (800) 988-8081
FAX: (202) 296-7779
e-mail: geninfo@character.org
Web site: http://www.character.org

Civic Practices Network (CPN)
Center for Human Resources
Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare
Brandeis University
60 Turner Street
Waltham, MA 02154

phone: (781) 736-4890
FAX: (781) 736-4891
e-mail: cpn@tiac.net
Web site: http://www.cpn.org

Communitarian Network
2130 H Street, N.W., Suite 714
Washington, D.C. 20052

phone: (800) 245-7460
FAX: (202) 994-1606
e-mail: comnet@gwu.edu
Web site: http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps

James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-7715

phone: (301) 405-6100
FAX: (301) 405-6402
e-mail: email@academy.umd.edu
Web site: http://www.civicsource.org

Josephson Institute of Ethics
4640 Admiralty Way, Suite 1001
Marina del Rey, CA 90292-6610

phone: (310) 306-1868
FAX: (310) 827-1864
e-mail: ji@jiethics.org
Web site: http://www.josephsoninstitute.org

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise
1424 16th Street, N.W., Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20003

phone: (202) 518-6500
FAX: (202) 588-0314
e-mail: info@ncne.com
Web site: http://www.ncne.com

National Civic League/Alliance for National Renewal (ANR)
1445 Market Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80202-1728

phone: (303) 571-4343
FAX: (303) 571-4404
e-mail: ncl@ncl.org
Web site: http://www.ncl.org

Pew Partnership for Civic Change
145-C Ednam Drive
Charlottesville, VA 22903

phone: (804) 971-2073
FAX: (804) 971-7042
e-mail: mail@pew-partnership.org
Web site: http://www.pew-partnership.org

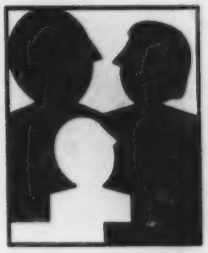
Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship
The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-4999

phone: (202) 546-4400
FAX: (202) 608-6136
e-mail: polrev@heritage.org
Web site: http://www.policyreview.com

Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Hickman Hall, Douglas Campus
89 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1411

phone: (732) 932-6861
FAX: (732) 932-1922
e-mail: bbarber@rci.rutgers.edu
Web site: http://www.cpn.org/sections/affiliates/whitman_center.html

Local Initiatives Support Corporation



Over the past twenty years, thousands of local, nonprofit Community Development Corporations have been formed by residents of America's inner cities. Their goal is to build affordable homes for working families, spur commercial investment, create jobs, and expand opportunities. The largest organization providing funding and technical assistance to these efforts is the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). Established by the Ford Foundation and six corporations in 1979, LISC has raised more than $2.2 billion for the benefit of more than 1,000 urban revitalization programs.

According to LISC president Paul Grogan, Community Development Corporations have built or renovated more than 70,000 homes and more than 10 million square feet of commercial space. And these projects have made a contribution beyond the obvious benefits to newly housed families and businesses. "The citizens who form these organizations understand that physical blight depresses everyone—depresses the prospects of their communities, serves as a magnet for social pathologies like drugs and drug dealers, and has a devastating impact on the morale of young people." Once the physical landscape is no longer strewn with weed-filled lots or abandoned cars, it becomes a symbol of hope for the people who live there.

In his testimony before the Commission, Grogan emphasized the role of "civic entrepreneurs" in restoring political power to distressed communities. As neighborhoods decline, he said, citizens lose "the capacity to bargain effectively with the local jurisdiction. So the trash doesn't get picked up, the police don't respond as quickly, park improvements are not made, and so forth. And this is one of the big negative multipliers that speeds communities on that downward spiral." Local renewal efforts, however, "have a magical effect of beginning to again extract a response from the public jurisdiction. So one begins to see, as if by magic, park improvements, police response, a community being served again and holding its own with its local political jurisdiction."

The community development movement highlights the importance of self-help and indigenous leadership. Grogan pointed to "the substantial hidden record of success that we can all talk about, when local leaders come together and chart their own course." LISC, he explained, "will not work in a community unless we're doing it through a local organization that we think is legitimate and is accountable to that community." Yet the history of community development also suggests the important role that an "outside entity" can play in neighborhood revitalization. Community Development Corporations "form lasting business relationships with banks, foundations, local and state government, to draw in the necessary capital and expertise initially to accomplish these concrete projects." Over time, "they open up channels through which ideas and capital can flow. And this breakdown of isolation, of course, has much broader, positive consequences."

Children's Aid Society

The Children's Aid Society serves more than 100,000 children and their families each year through its health, education, and counseling programs in New York City. Recently, it became a partner with the New York City Board of Education in creating and managing four "community schools" in upper Manhattan.

The idea for these schools emerged as Children's Aid set out to expand its services in Washington Heights, the area north of Harlem. The goal, executive director Philip Coltoff told the Commission, was to take social agencies and health services and integrate them "organically, seamlessly, with educational institutions." Children's Aid envisioned school buildings that would be open until 9 or 10 o'clock each weeknight, on weekends, and throughout the summer, functioning as health, educational, and recreational centers for the community. This meant designing schools with clinics, family resource rooms, and expanded arts rooms, as well as bleachers and outdoor lighting for the playgrounds.

The first of the community schools opened in 1991. Built for 1,200 middle-school students, it enrolled 1,600 at the start. (Today the partnership operates a second middle school and two elementary schools as well.) Coltoff told the Commission that 1,100 parents also began attending — some in adult education courses, others in classes with their children. A site-based management program gave parents a direct role in administering the school. In cooperation with the teachers, Children's Aid created after-school activities that run from 3 o'clock, when classes end, until 9 o'clock each night. It operates summer camps for neighborhood children. And, as a result of a further partnership with 60 area businesses, Children's Aid has set up a school-to-work program for both children and adults.

The initial results, Coltoff reported, are these: "In all four schools, reading scores have improved by 60 percent, math scores by 45 percent. The school dropout rate is the lowest in the city. There are virtually no security issues — no metal detectors, no security guards that search children when they come in." The Washington Heights community schools have the highest attendance rates in the district, and two have the highest in the city. Even more interesting, said Coltoff, is that "in all four schools, the teacher attendance is the highest in the city. Teachers feel safe. They feel that they want to teach; they have back-up from health professionals and social workers."

Through its community schools and other programs, Children's Aid has also provided opportunities for youth voluntarism. One group of teenagers in Washington Heights obtained permission to run an informal day care center in the local welfare office, making things easier for young mothers who "bring their little kids and have to hang around and wait on long lines." Students in another program refurbished a subway station. The adult world, said Coltoff, rarely allows teenagers "to express what is very often the natural altruism of that age." And yet, when "you give young people a feeling that they're doing something for their block, for their neighborhood, for their neighbors, these are things that kids want to do."

Hands On Atlanta

The dozen or so young adults who founded Hands On Atlanta in 1989 were responding to two unmet needs in their community. On the one hand, they felt that established service organizations weren't sufficiently creative or flexible in arranging opportunities for civic voluntarism. Trying to get involved in volunteer work was often a frustrating and difficult process. On the other hand, there was clearly much to be done in Atlanta on behalf of disadvantaged children, the homeless, the afflicted, and the elderly. There were also scores of nonprofit agencies that could benefit from the energy and expertise of new volunteers.

Over the past eight years, Hands On Atlanta has taken responsibility for assisting both potential volunteers and the organizations that can make use of their talents. Each month, participants receive a free newsletter listing service opportunities, from mentoring and tutoring programs, to conservation efforts, to AIDS and disability support projects. Hands On Atlanta now has a corps of 13,000 volunteers. In 1996, they took part in 2,600 projects, contributing more than 263,000 hours to 78 community agencies. All of these hours were devoted to direct service—tutoring children, repairing donated bicycles, planting gardens—and none to fund-raising or political advocacy.

Hands On Atlanta's programming, said board member Jill Morehouse Lum, "is designed to naturally draw people in at a level they are comfortable with." Each issue of the newsletter includes "evening, weekend, one-time, small-group, or big-event projects to fit every schedule, skill, and interest." A first-time volunteer may spend a Saturday helping to build ramps at the homes of low-income seniors, or painting a classroom for the Discovery program in the public schools. As part of the organization's Citizen Schools initiative, AmeriCorps members have set up after-school programs that "allow hundreds of volunteers to step into meaningful roles as tutors, mentors, and project leaders." There are also special training programs for teachers, partnerships with corporate volunteers, and service opportunities for the students themselves.

Lum believes that the success of her program "offers an important perspective in the conversation about moral decline" in the United States. "My friends at Hands On Atlanta would probably say that the problem is not apathy, but barriers to opportunity," she explained. "When we got started eight years ago, I don't think anyone realized the potential impact of a flexible, diverse menu of volunteer projects available from one source, coupled with limitless opportunities for leadership and learning in a community of volunteers." Now service organizations across the country are heeding Hands On Atlanta's central lesson: "When people know that they are meeting a need and making a real difference, when they are enriched by the experience and their skills and time are well used, and when they have opportunities to learn and grow and contribute in new ways, they keep coming back."

National Fatherhood Initiative

The National Fatherhood Initiative seeks to improve the well-being of children by increasing the number of children growing up with involved, committed, and responsible fathers. Twenty-four million American children, almost 4 out of 10, now live apart from their fathers, Initiative president Wade Horn told the Commission. In 1960, the figure was 8 million. By some estimates, 60 percent of children born in the 1990s will spend a significant portion of their early lives in fatherless households. Of these children, the Initiative reports, "40 percent have not seen their fathers at all during the previous year. Only one in six see their fathers an average of once or more a week."

The consequences for children who are reared without fathers include a "non-trivial increase of risk" for poverty, school failure, and emotional and behavioral problems. This is not to say that such children are "doomed," Horn explained. Those who establish a close relationship with "an adult male figure somewhere in their orbit," or who live in a community that supports them "and provides other role models," see their prospects improve. The difficulty, Horn said, is that "we are talking about some communities now where you can go look up and down the street and not see a single home with a father inside it. And that is a very different experience than for a child who grew up 30, 35 years ago without a father, but 90 percent of the households in their community did have a father in them."

Unlike most of the groups studied by the Commission, the National Fatherhood Initiative is not a direct-service organization. "At our core," said Horn, "we are about broad-based social change. And a part of our mission has always been about stimulating a social movement coalescing around the issue of fatherhood promotion." The Initiative has sponsored advertising campaigns, citizen forums, and program fairs that highlight local efforts to promote "father involvement." It provides resource materials and technical assistance to civic and religious organizations that are seeking to implement fatherhood outreach, skill-building, and support groups. It has also made recommendations to state governments, communities, and businesses on how to encourage and support responsible fatherhood.

"Certainly we believe that it is within the capacity of most men to make an individual moral choice to be a good and involved, responsible and committed father," Horn said. "And we want to encourage men to make that moral choice. At the same time, as a psychiatrist I'm quite aware that choices are made within a broader social context. And while, in the end, we always have free choice—we can always make a decision, even if every social force is in the opposite direction—it is easier if the broader culture supports certain choices over others."

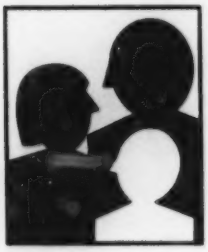
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America

For more than 90 years, Big Brothers/Big Sisters has recruited adult volunteers to serve as mentors and role models for young people at risk. Its 500 state and local agencies match volunteers with children based on each child's specific needs and interests. A recent study by Public/Private Ventures found that volunteers have a significant impact in the areas of alcohol and substance abuse prevention: children with a Big Brother or Big Sister were half as likely as their peers in a control group to get involved in first use of drugs, and 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use. Moreover, children in the program were half as likely to skip a day of school, and about a third less likely to engage in violent behavior. Family relations improved as well; the study found that participating children were 36 percent less likely to lie to a parent.

"Our vision," said executive director Thomas McKenna, is one of "caring adults in the life of every child in need." But this, he explained, is not a vision that can be realized simply by "parachuting volunteers in and throwing them at the kids. That's definitely not our approach." Instead, Big Brothers/Big Sisters directs its efforts towards families as well as individual children. Eighty percent of the youngsters matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister are being raised by single mothers. These women come to the program seeking mentors for their sons or daughters; they participate in the selection of the Big Brother or Big Sister, and they attend support groups with other parents. Throughout the process, they, no less than the volunteers, are recognized as "caring adults" in their children's lives.

On average, the relationships that "Bigs" establish with children in the program last for more than two and a half years. No one can step in and turn a child's life around overnight, McKenna explained, nor is it possible to dictate the course that a mentoring relationship will take. "Volunteers who are there, who are consistent, who are listening, who are supportive," he said, "are much more likely to be successful than those who come in with a prescription for what they'd like to see happen to a particular kid."

An effective mentoring program includes recruitment, selection, screening, training, and ongoing support. For this reason, it is a major challenge to expand such programs in underserved communities. But the need is very great. McKenna reported that 40,000 children nationwide are waiting to be matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister. "It could be three times that," he added, "if we didn't close down waiting lists after a period of time." In response to these conditions, Big Brothers/Big Sisters is trying to forge alliances with established African American and Latino organizations; with schools, corporations, and labor unions; and with other private service agencies.



Public Achievement, St. Bernard's Grade School

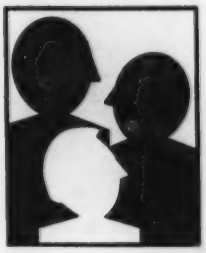
Each fall at St. Bernard's, a Catholic parish school in St. Paul, Minn., students gather in a third-floor assembly room to launch that year's program in Public Achievement. The children themselves are the main speakers at this event. The discussion turns on issues that they consider important—some related to the school or neighborhood, others with national or global implications. As many as thirty students make individual presentations, each one hoping to recruit members to a group that will organize a class trip, publish a community newspaper, help the homeless, stage a play, or march in an anti-violence campaign. The groups will meet each Thursday over the course of the semester or school year to carry out their projects.

Public Achievement at St. Bernard's is the result of a partnership between the school and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota. Students from the university come to St. Bernard's as "coaches" for the Public Achievement groups, helping them learn to define community problems, develop strategies for public action, and work with other concerned citizens. Coaches also provide students with opportunities to practice specific skills, such as public speaking, that may be crucial to a group's success, and they help students assess their performance, just as sports coaches do. These activities are framed by a conception of "public work"—the importance of thinking, speaking, and acting as citizens and of taking responsibility for our civic condition.

In the eight years since the partnership began, Public Achievement has become a central feature of the school's life. This is true, in part, because St. Bernard's sees the program as a chance to explore the relevance and practical implications of Church teachings on social justice. "I don't think it's enough just to do charity," principal Dennis Donovan told the Commission. "I think we need to teach our children how to get at the cause of the problems that are facing our cities and our nation." Thus, he described Public Achievement both as "an opportunity to educate children around citizenship skills" and as "a response to the mission of the Catholic Church." It teaches children how to "get out in the public arena to make a difference on the values that are important to us as Catholics and Christians."

This does not mean that students in the program always contend with grave public issues. Tamishia Anderson, a sixth grader at St. Bernard's, belonged to a group that pressed for changes in the school dress code; their goal was to make high-top tennis shoes an acceptable part of the uniform. "We went around the whole school taking a vote," she explained. "We also presented this idea to the parents. They approved." The next year, Tamishia joined a group assisting the homeless. "We accomplished a food and clothing drive; it was great," she said. "We actually got to go to a real shelter." In every case, Public Achievement tries to make issues "real" to the students; it isn't a question of doing good in the abstract, but of meeting concrete social needs.

Youth in Action, San Francisco Conservation Corps



Since 1983, the San Francisco Conservation Corps has been providing job training, education, and volunteer service opportunities for young people between the ages of 12 and 24. A program called Youth in Action is specifically designed for middle-school children. Members pursue academic and community improvement goals simultaneously, and they receive guidance both from experienced adults and from older students. "Youth in Action," co-director Thomas Ahn explained, "is really about young people teaching other young people"—whether the subject is algebra or effective strategies for community development.

On weekdays during the school year, Youth in Action operates a center where children receive tutoring in core academic subjects and take a special class in environmental education. On Saturdays, these same children "go out in groups and provide services for the city of San Francisco." This may mean working at a food bank or cleaning up public parks, "making documentary videos about pertinent issues," or putting together a newspaper. A similar mix of programs continues into the summer, but the pace is more intense: the students come in five days a week, and they take three academic courses in addition to performing a service project each day.

"Now that doesn't sound very different from many other programs that are going on," Ahn said. "But I think one of the things that makes our program unique is that we have 15-year-olds teaching physics classes—giving out homework, thinking about how their students learn, thinking about what they need to know to step into the classroom, about deadlines for turning in lesson plans." Students whom Ahn calls "rising ninth graders" enroll in a leadership class, often taught by college students or recent college graduates, in which they learn how to conduct a community-needs assessment and to mobilize residents to address those needs. "They learn about setting career goals, strategic planning, about funding sources and funding restrictions," Ahn explained. "And then, using those skills, they go out to design community service projects for themselves."

As co-director, Ahn has interviewed hundreds of applicants to Youth in Action. When he asks why they want to join, he usually gets one of two answers: "If I don't do this, I'll be hanging out on the street," or "I want to do something to help my community." These are not "just the 4.0, straight-A students," Ahn said. "Some of these kids can barely spell their name right. But the desire to be involved is there." What they have lacked until now is actual knowledge of "how to get things done" and "how to become involved in a real way."

Character Counts! Coalition

Character Counts! is a nonpartisan alliance of 150 educational and human-service organizations. Founded by the Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics in 1992, the Coalition develops curricula to impress upon young people the importance of good character. It also supports training sessions for public and private school teachers, and sponsors community forums to build consensus on core ethical values. In its outreach programs, Character Counts! works not only with classroom teachers but also with community groups, churches, and after-school program staff. It conducts special workshops for counselors and teachers of adolescents in the juvenile justice system. Instructors include parents, other community volunteers, and young people themselves.

The Coalition's first task, five years ago, was to arrive at a definition of character—to decide what behaviors and attitudes it would try to foster. For this purpose, the Josephson Institute invited a group of educators, youth leaders, and ethicists to deliberate about the content and purposes of character education. The participants shared a conviction, in the words of trainer Nancy Van Gulick, that "there are some universal core values that can be taught"—values that are not identified with any single political or religious agenda, but which "form the foundation of democratic society." In what became known as the Aspen Declaration, the members of this group specified six "pillars of character": trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. And they agreed that character education must publicly affirm and inculcate these values, in the face of social and cultural forces that counteract or actively undermine them.

The Coalition tailors its programs to different age groups and settings. It produces workbooks and videos with cartoon characters for very young children, lesson plans for elementary and secondary school classes, and resource guides for parents, coaches, and community groups. Coalition members—from youth ministries to civic groups to sports clubs—often devise their own activities and curricula. In Albuquerque, N.M., whose citywide commitment to Character Counts! began in 1993, local businesses have raised thousands of dollars to rebuild middle-school athletic programs and make them venues for character education. Special programs have been developed for high schools and workplaces; Character Counts! messages appear on buses, billboards, and utility bills. Three months after the program was instituted at one elementary school, the number of discipline citations had fallen by a third.

U.S. Youth Soccer

For more than twenty years, U.S. Youth Soccer has helped provide children with recreational programs that support their "physical, mental, and emotional growth and development." A division of the United States Soccer Federation, U.S. Youth Soccer started with 100,000 members in 1974. In 1997, it enrolled more than 2.5 million members, all of them players between the ages of 6 and 19 years. Like Little Leagues and other youth sports organizations, it has promoted the active involvement of parents and other volunteers. And in many parts of the country, soccer teams have become sources of social cohesion and community identity.

During the 1997 presidential election, pollsters and political analysts suddenly discovered "soccer moms." But their existence was no surprise to the youth soccer establishment, which credits mothers and fathers both with keeping the game alive. "As national organizations," said chairman Virgil Lewis, II, "we could never afford the staff necessary to support over 3 million players." Instead, they rely on volunteers — more than 500,000 of them, including 250,000 coaches. Young people, as well as parents and neighbors, are now becoming leaders in the organization. "Teenaged referees are officiating games played by 6-year-olds," said Lewis. "More of our former players are now entering the administrative and coaching ranks of our volunteers."

Without discounting the sheer fun of youth soccer for its participants, Lewis also emphasized the character-building potential of the game — its lessons in patience and teamwork and sportsmanship. "Coaches and referees are taught the need for sportsmanship in every clinic that they attend," he said. "They are encouraged to pass this concept to parents through team management training." In addition, Lewis noted that soccer gives children something to do instead of getting into trouble. Organized sports, he told the Commission, do "take people out of harm's way," even as they offer "something that we feel is very constructive and value-based."

In a growing initiative called Soccer Start, U.S. Youth Soccer has helped create inner-city leagues in Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas; in Minneapolis and Indianapolis; and in Washington, D.C. "The reason we're not doing it in all 50 states," Lewis said, is that "we can't go in from an outside area, from a suburb, and start a program in the inner city. We have to first identify those key volunteers in the inner city, and allow them to run that program. What we will do is provide the support in a national fashion." Citing last year's Carnegie report on sports and youth development, Lewis argued that all children need "experiences involving personal discipline and the ability to persevere," and that programs such as youth soccer can provide these experiences to children of all abilities and backgrounds. Ethnic leagues were central to soccer's early history in the United States, but Lewis believes that the sport can also promote racial and ethnic integration: "There are no language barriers in the game of soccer."

Charlotte Observer: "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods"

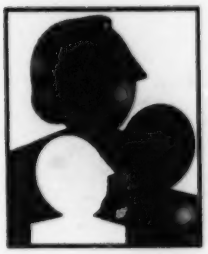
Four years ago, the Charlotte Observer began to question its coverage of urban violence. Two young police officers had been killed while chasing a drug dealer through a public housing project, and their deaths had become, for many in Charlotte, a symbol of the violence and other social ills afflicting the city's poorer neighborhoods. At the same time, assistant managing editor Jim Walser said, the killings "made us at the newspaper reexamine the way that we covered crime." Until then, the Observer's reporting had been as "episodic" as a police blotter. But editors and staff concluded that this approach "never gave us a true picture of what it was like to live in the neighborhoods that were most affected by drugs, violence, teenage pregnancy, dropouts, a number of other things. We didn't get a full picture. So we decided we would take it a very different way."

From 1994 until early 1996, the Observer ran a series of stories called "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods." One purpose of the series was to clarify the nature and extent of the crime problem. To this end, the newspaper analyzed crime statistics, identifying the ten most violent neighborhoods in the city, and polled the residents about the threat of violence in their daily lives. But the paper also spent much of its energy "talking and writing about solutions." The series featured successful programs in other parts of the country, hoping "to draw a picture of what had worked in other neighborhoods that had faced similar problems." It also called attention to civic initiatives already under way in Charlotte. Soon the Observer was publishing a directory of local service organizations, and the United Way opened a telephone hot line to enlist new community volunteers.

The series generated a tremendous response. "When we asked people to show up for town meetings and to be on advisory panels to help us decide what the story was, they actually participated," Walser said. "They came out; they came out in hundreds." This citizen involvement not only shaped the Observer's coverage; it also helped change the political dynamics of the city. Residents "packed gymnasiums and churches throughout Charlotte to come and tell people on these panels — like the police chief, county commissioners, city councilmen — what they thought the problems were," Walser said. "These are people in poor neighborhoods, for the most part, who traditionally have not had much access to public officials because, quite simply, they don't vote. So they don't get much of an audience."

The Observer's experiment in "civic journalism" was one of four such projects evaluated in a 1996 study. Researchers concluded that these projects are remarkably successful in commanding citizen attention and support, and in increasing public discussion in their communities. In Charlotte, 84 percent of citizens said that "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" had made them think more about the causes of crime. Civic journalism, the study reported, "seemed to open options in these communities, giving leaders and citizens alike a greater sense of possibility than they had before about solving local problems."

Close Up Foundation



A number of Commission members and witnesses expressed concern that "we don't teach civics anymore" in the United States. In surveys which ask Americans to respond to passages from the nation's founding documents, many people fail to recognize the language of the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Often, too, they disagree with the unfamiliar notions they find there. These results suggest not only a failure of civic education, but also a lack of consensus about the obligations and rules that are to govern our relations with the state and with one another.

The Close Up Foundation has tried to refashion the teaching of civics in the United States by inviting students to observe and participate directly in the political process. Each year it brings thousands of students and teachers to Washington, D.C., to meet with elected officials, to attend hearings, and to learn about contemporary issues. "We try to empower young people," said Charles Tampio, vice president for programs. They learn the basics—the three branches of government, the separation of powers, how a bill becomes law. But they also discover "how they as citizens can influence public policy." Sometimes, Tampio said, visiting students may crowd the Capitol, but "it belongs to them as much as it belongs to anyone else." Direct experience "helps to connect young people to these processes that seem otherwise abstract to them." It also promotes "positive attitudes about government that simply are very hard to achieve otherwise through the standard curriculum."

Tampio emphasized that Close Up programs are not restricted to youngsters from wealthy school districts, or high scorers on the SAT, or leaders in student government. "We don't focus on any elites," Tampio told the Commission. "We try to reach all kinds of kids." A special program for "new Americans," including both recent arrivals and children of migrant families, brings 1,800 students to Washington each year. High school students in Hawaii can take part in an international studies program focusing on cultural, economic, and security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. "If you want to insure the inclusion of these groups," Tampio said, "then you have to work at it explicitly, and you have to secure the resources to make it happen."

The Close Up model has been successfully duplicated at the state and municipal levels. Students in Rhode Island, for example, can visit their state legislature in Providence as well as the U.S. Congress in Washington. "We have about a hundred of these programs that go on around the United States," Tampio reported. In addition, students who visit Washington hear a farewell "sermon" about the importance of participating in local politics once they get home. This exhortation is accompanied by publications advising them, and their teachers, how to do just that. Close Up also designs classroom-based curricula for middle-school students, integrated with civic research and service learning projects.

Project Vote Smart

Project Vote Smart is a national organization that offers free, direct access to information on elected officials and candidates for office. Through its telephone hot line, its printed voter guides, and its Web site, it provides citizens with the voting records of their representatives, campaign finance reports, biographical data, and performance ratings by more than 70 independent interest groups. It also enables people to read summaries or actual texts of proposed legislation, follow a bill's progress as it works its way through Congress, and obtain background material on current policy debates.

As a nonpartisan source of political information, Project Vote Smart is meant to be "a point of departure for a whole new range of activities for citizens," board president Clare Scheuren told the Commission. Too often, she said, it is the news media that set the nation's political agenda, while the public is "left out of the decision-making process about what's important and what's not." Voters become alienated because they do not see their own concerns reflected in mainstream political debate. By contacting Project Vote Smart, "folks can say for themselves what they care about, instead of someone telling them what they care about." In effect, "they can take charge of their political education." As a result, callers to Project Vote Smart "are in a position to act in an informed way—to write letters to the editor, to contact their member of Congress directly, to go to public forums, to ask challenging questions, to get in touch with the newspaper's news department and say, 'What are you guys doing over there?'"

During its first national test in 1992, Project Vote Smart received 209,000 calls. During the 1996 election, with its Web site up and running, it answered 4 million requests for information. Some of the questioners may already be habitual voters or active followers of politics. But as Scheuren noted in her testimony, Project Vote Smart conducts special projects in areas "where there are large numbers of people who haven't traditionally voted—low-income, minority, and youth voters." It publishes its annual *Voter's Self-Defense Manual* in multiple languages, including Spanish and Chinese. It also collaborates with other civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, whose mission is to foster political awareness and involvement.

Would a better-informed citizenry be less cynical about government, or would it discover evidence that only deepened its alienation and distrust? Scheuren believes that voters who *lack* information about the policy process are most likely to be cynics. They are the ones who tend to believe that "ideas don't matter much—that ideas don't have the power to generate or inspire concern and social action, or political action." In contrast, she said, knowledgeable citizens are more likely to feel that "ideas have tremendous vitality and tremendous impact"—that indeed, ideas are "truly the driving force of our democracy."

APPENDICES

APPENDICES

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MEETINGS

First Plenary Session– *January 24-25, 1997*

Witnesses:

James Davison Hunter
The Post-Modernity Project
University of Virginia

Alan Wolfe
Boston University

Andrew Kohut
Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

Wendy Rahn
University of Minnesota

David Bositis
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Harry Pachon
Tomas Rivera Policy Institute

William Schambra
Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

Theda Skocpol
Harvard University

Second Plenary Session– *May 18-19, 1997*

Witnesses:

Paul Grogan
Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Philip Coltoff
Children's Aid Society

Jill Morehouse Lum
Hands On Atlanta

Wade Horn
National Fatherhood Initiative

Thomas McKenna
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America

Dennis Donovan, Tamishia Anderson, Becky Wichlacz
Public Achievement, St. Bernard's Grade School

Thomas Ahn
Youth in Action, San Francisco Conservation Corps

Nancy Van Gulick
Character Counts! Coalition

Virgil Lewis, II
U.S. Youth Soccer

Jim Walser
Charlotte Observer

Charles M. Tampio
Close Up Foundation

Clare Scheuren
Project Vote Smart

Third Plenary Session– *September 14-15, 1997*

Deliberations by Commission members

Fourth Plenary Session– *January 20-21, 1998*

Deliberations by Commission members and Senior Advisors

ADVISORY PANELS

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Institute for American Values

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Center for Democracy and Citizenship
University of Minnesota

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Civil Society Project

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Communitarian Network
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University of Texas

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Pew Center for Civic Journalism

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The Harwood Group

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Independent Sector

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The Post-Modernity Project
University of Virginia

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Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics

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Center for Living Democracy

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America Speaks

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Hudson Institute

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Stanford University

Will Marshall
Progressive Policy Institute

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Charles F. Kettering Foundation

Sanford McDonnell
Character Education Partnership

Adam Meyerson
Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship

Suzanne Morse
Pew Partnership for Civic Change

John Parr
Center for Regional and Neighborhood Action

Charles Quigley
Center for Civic Education

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Madrona Investment Group

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Institute for Policy Studies
Johns Hopkins University

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Harvard University

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Civic Practices Network

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Center for Political Leadership and Participation
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Harvard University

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The Wexler Group

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DYG Inc. & Public Agenda Foundation

Civil Society Working Group

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Rutgers University

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Columbia University

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University of Rochester

Loren E. Lomasky
Bowling Green State University

Kathleen D. McCarthy
Graduate Center, City University of New York

Nancy L. Rosenblum
Brown University

William A. Schambra
Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

Kathryn Kish Sklar
State University of New York, Binghamton

Steven Rathgeb Smith
University of Washington

William M. Sullivan
La Salle University

Robert Wuthnow
Princeton University

WORKING PAPERS

#1 The Role of Trust in Civic Renewal
Robert Wuthnow
Princeton University

#2 The Moral Uses of Pluralism
Nancy L. Rosenblum
Brown University

#3 Making Civil Society Work: Democracy as a Problem of Civic Cooperation
William M. Sullivan
La Salle University

#4 Clansmen, Consumers and Citizens: Three Takes on Civil Society
Benjamin R. Barber
Rutgers University

#5 Is There Civic Life beyond the Great National Community?
William A. Schambra
Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

#6 American Civil Society Talk
Jean L. Cohen
Columbia University

#7 Civic Infrastructure in America: The Interrelationship between Government and Voluntary Associations
Steven Rathgeb Smith
University of Washington

#8 An Historical Model of Women's Voluntarism and the State, 1890–1920
Kathryn Kish Sklar
State University of New York, Binghamton

#9 Will the Circle Be Unbroken? The Erosion and Transformation of African American Civic Life
Fredrick C. Harris
University of Rochester

#10 Civil Enough: Toward a Liberal Theory of Vice (and Virtue)
Loren E. Lomasky
Bowling Green State University

#11 Religion, Philanthropy, and Political Culture
Kathleen D. McCarthy
Graduate Center, City University of New York

#12 Self-Help Groups, Affinity-Based Community, and Civil Society
David Wasserman
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#13 Transitional Justice and International Civil Society
David Crocker
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#14 From Civil Society to Democracy: A Critique of Civil Society Determinism
Xiaorong Li
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#15 The Changing Role of Expertise in Public Deliberation
Robert Wachbroit
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#16 The View from Quincy Library: Civic Engagement in Environmental Problem-Solving
Mark Sagoff
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#17 Beyond the Public Journalism Controversy
Judith Lichtenberg
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland

#18 Reconceptualizing Home and Economy Boundaries
Jerome M. Segal
Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy
University of Maryland